

Kakemonos

W. Carlton Dawe



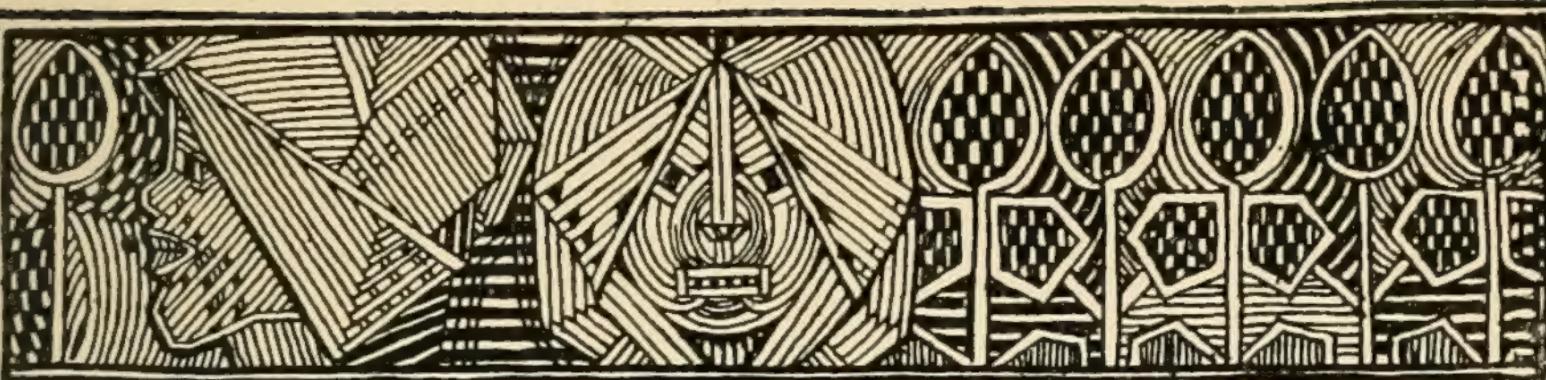
Herbert Smith

KAKEMONOS

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KAKEMONOS
TALES OF THE
FAR EAST

BY W. CARLTON DAWE

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
ON THE BANKS OF THE MENAM	I
HIS JAPANESE WIFE	36
‘PULO CONDORE’	56
A NIGHT IN CANTON	75
WHY MRS. WETHERTON WENT HOME	103
THE PHANTOM JUNK	120
THE PASSENGER AFT	139
CHIEF OFFICER GROVER	181
SAYŌNARA	203



ON THE BANKS OF THE MENAM

THE voyage up the Gulf of Siam had been an uneventful one, and we had no sooner cast anchor off the island of Koh-si-chang than I was all impatience to be away sight-seeing at Bangkok. But our ship being too big to go up the Menam, we perforce had to wait for the small steamer which plies between the island and the capital, unless we cared about venturing a voyage in one of the rice-boats. This latter alternative not being to our way of thinking, we decided to await the steamer ; so, the next morning after breakfast, we got out one of the ship's boats and pulled ashore in search of game. In those days there were only a couple of native huts on Koh-si-chang, the half-clothed inhabitants of which rolled out to gaze with wonder upon the white invaders. It is with surprise I hear that the king has since built a summer palace there,

2 TALES OF THE FAR EAST

and that at certain seasons of the year the desolate little island is astir with the great ones of the land.

However, at daybreak of the following morning we boarded the little steamer, which had duly arrived during the night, and which lay-to alongside of us for the purpose, and away we went for the capital. Our captain was a long, thin Englishman with a dark, untrimmed beard, who had spent the best twenty years of his life in that enervating region, and who now appeared so attenuated and feeble that you found yourself wondering how he managed to hold together. The only other European on board was the engineer, a sturdy Scot, who dined with us in his greasy singlet and read Goethe in German betweenwhiles. He too had spent the best years of his life loafing about the coast ; but the climate, or his greasy profession, seemed to agree very well with him, for to me he appeared a substantially built man, and he ate heartily of the curious-smelling food which the native cook provided.

After we had crossed the bar the real interest of the journey began. We passed the Paknam fortifications, which in after years were to fail so

ON THE BANKS OF THE MENAM 3

lamentably before a third-rate French gun-boat, but which the natives thought effectually secured them against invasion from the sea. Here and there the curious-shaped *wats*, or temples, towered up out of the thick jungle, while numbers of yellow-robed priests passing up and down the river lent movement and variety to the scene. Here a blue-funnel boat, bound for Singapore, forged slowly past us through the thick water; there, a little higher up, we met a Scottish Oriental, deep-laden, bound for Hong-Kong. The further up we advanced the busier grew the scene; and when at length we made fast to a buoy in mid-stream, we appeared to be in the centre of the shipping industry. To be sure, there was no 'forest of masts,' but nevertheless there was apparently a considerable trade done.

The rest of that day was spent in driving through the city, and after dinner that same evening we went, in company with a fellow from the British consulate, to see the sights of the town. He was a good sort, was well known, and consequently well received; but of the things we saw, or of the things we did, I have no intention of speaking—that is, with one exception.

4 TALES OF THE FAR EAST

Our peregrinations happened to bring us within the vicinity of the native theatre and the clash of tom-toms. Then our consular friend suddenly started, like one remembering an important thing, and suggested a visit to the native abode of Thespis. Without more ado we agreed, and as we walked along he informed us that the performers were really the slaves of a wealthy nobleman, who allowed them to appear in this public capacity two or three times every year.

I shouldn't like to be forced to tell what the play was about, having but a hazy recollection of it all. There was a considerable number of large-limbed women who kicked up their heels and displayed their naked shoulders to advantage, and there was one triple-crowned contortionist, evidently the 'star,' who came in for the lion's share of the applause. It was in its way exceedingly clever, and one should only judge things according to their pretensions. I confess I didn't care much for it myself, though I must also admit that our friend from the consulate seemed to think it a remarkably fine exhibition.

His official standing had enabled us to get

fairly close to the big square which did duty for a stage, while the position I occupied was not many feet from the performers. Indeed, when the *corps de ballet* filled the scene, one of its most prominent members was very near to me.

Yes, it all happened very quickly. I first noted her gaudy yellow dress, then her bare arms and shoulders. I thought she looked pale in the artificial light, perhaps a little tired or ill ; but her eyes shone into mine with an intense-ness quite bewildering. She was a grand girl, standing firmly on her feet, and carrying her head as though it were the rarest jewel in the world. Though, under all circumstances, a scrupulously conscientious man, I was not one to turn away when a lady looked at me. I therefore did my best to appease her curiosity. That she was extremely curious there could be little doubt, for whenever she came on the stage her great black eyes sought me out, and when I smiled she smiled, at first in a nervous, hesitating way, as though she feared some one would see her. Indeed, I was afterwards told that the ladies were watched with a vigilance peculiar to the East ; but as I looked upon the eye-making as merely a momentary joke, I did

6 TALES OF THE FAR EAST

not display that discretion which the circumstances really warranted.

‘Do you see that woman?’ I whispered to my consular friend, nodding towards the divinity in old gold.

‘See her!’ he laughed. ‘Egad, I’ve done nothing but see her lately! At first I thought she was looking at me, but, by George, it’s another dog altogether!’

‘What do you think of her, eh?’

‘Oh,’ he answered indifferently, and, I thought, a little spitefully, ‘you won’t notice her teeth in the dark.’

I laughed. ‘She’s got a pair of shoulders, though.’

‘Most women have.’

‘And an ankle.’

‘A common failing of the sex.’

‘Get out! But no larks, now.’

‘Restrain your ardour, my dear fellow. Her ankles are as far beyond your reach as though she were in heaven.’

‘I don’t know.’

‘You’re not likely to. It’s true, all the same. My dear fellow, this woman is one of Prince Krum’s beauties. Who the devil is Prince

Krum? Only a cousin of the king, and one of the richest men in the country. Guarded? I should think they are. Spies everywhere. You see that fat old chap with the womanish face?—that one over there, the one with the little red cap. No, don't point. There, he's looking at you now. Well, he's the guardian of this bevy of beauty. I know him quite well by sight, the beastly old eunuch !'

This piece of information startled me somewhat, for I had been watching this old man for a considerable time, wondering why he stared so persistently at me. I turned to the girl and caught her eyes, and, as if my brain transferred its thought to hers, she immediately began to study the pattern of the carpet. I thought I saw a peculiar smile break across the swollen face of the eunuch. I know I felt decidedly foolish and uncomfortable.

'Better give it up, old man,' said my consular friend encouragingly, as we emerged from the theatre. 'Trust Krum for taking good care of his pet birds.'

'Damn Krum !'

'With pleasure ; but that won't drag those ankles out of heaven.'

8 TALES OF THE FAR EAST

Then he patted me affably on the back, told me to cheer up, and otherwise endeavoured to console me with a chattering stream of ridicule. I bore it all good-naturedly enough, the incident not having yet attained a serious interest. Moreover, I had noted a tone of pique in his voice, and this rendered me complaisant. He could not forgive the girl for her lamentable lack of taste.

And yet I was not so sure, should I feel inclined to press the adventure further, that the girl was as far beyond me as he pretended. True, I hadn't the remotest knowledge of her whereabouts, nor had I formed any plan which might enable me to discover her; and yet I had a half-belief, a sort of intuition, that I should meet her again, if only in heaven. I, however, refrained from acquainting my sceptical friend with this belief. Being utterly devoid of sentiment, he would not have understood me, and there is nothing more trying to exaltation than contemptible commonplaces.

We returned to our hotel by boat, and an extremely pleasant journey it was down the moonlit river. My companions chatted away

merrily, while now and again our jovial guide tipped us a stave of a popular song. He was a merry dog, and his merriment proved catching. Trying to persuade myself that my pretty little adventure was mercilessly nipped in the bud, I did my best to banish the girl from my thoughts, lit a cigar, and lent a robust voice to the chorus which rolled noisily over the white, soft bosom of the Menam.

But our friend from the consulate had forgotten to apprise us of the fact that the city of Bangkok boasts an extremely singular product known as the 'hat-snatcher,' a person who plies his trade in the most open and barefaced manner. What a half-naked coolie could do with European hats when stolen would at first seem something of a problem ; but as there are thousands of pawnshops in the city, mostly owned by Chinese, no doubt he finds a ready market. The Chinaman, on the other hand, is much too clever to buy anything he can't get rid of at a good profit.

It was the morning after our visit to the theatre, and we arose with the intention of further exploring the city. As I stepped out from the hotel and looked up and down the

river, a coolie in a flaring loin-cloth came within my line of vision, but, being only a coolie, his presence occasioned no surprise. Indeed, so little attention did I pay him that I started suddenly when I found him whining at my side. One hand was outstretched in a nervous manner, and between his brown fingers he held a slip of red paper like a Chinese visiting-card. He spoke rapidly, and in a low, earnest tone, but of course I could not understand a syllable he uttered. Thinking, however, that he was begging, and wishing to get rid of him, I flung him a small coin and bade him be off; but instead of picking up the money he shook his head, advanced a step nearer me, and began speaking more earnestly than ever. Not knowing what the fellow's object could be, I raised my stick threateningly and drove him back. I was never quite sure whether the look that leapt into his eyes at this action was one of anger or regret; but of one thing I am sure, and that is that he hung his head dejectedly as I turned away and re-entered the hotel.

Upon emerging a few minutes later I looked round for him, but he was nowhere to be seen,

and, prompted by curiosity, I walked over to the spot where he had approached me. To my surprise I saw the coin still glittering on the ground, and for some inexplicable reason left it there.

But out in the road, by the fence of the French consulate, I again saw the same coolie, who salaamed as solemnly as before. I don't know how it happened, but I found myself salaaming in return, and then to my infinite relief the carriage dashed on citywards.

I thought no more of the matter till my companion drew my attention to the fact that the man was following us. Under ordinary circumstances such an occurrence might be deemed unimportant, as droves of whining beggars invariably follow the European; but this man I knew to be no beggar. What was he, then?

I turned round in my seat so as to get a better look at him, but all these coolies seem so much alike that it requires a trained eye to pick out any peculiarity of gait or feature. He came along easily enough, the sun flashing on his bare body. When he saw me looking he stopped dead, salaamed respectfully, and then came on again. I waved indignantly

for him to go away, but he paid no heed to the protest.

‘What persistent brutes they are!’ said my companion. ‘That fellow’ll cling to our heels till he gets what he wants.’

‘Yes.’

But I did not like to say how strangely the man’s presence affected me; nor, for some absurd reason, did I mention aught concerning my previous interview with him. Who was he? what was he? A spy, a thief, or a possible murderer? I own to being most unaccountably puzzled, nor was I without a certain sort of anxiety. And yet I did not think the man was either a thief or a murderer, though he could be following me for no good reason.

Full of curious conjecture, I threw myself back on the seat and tried hard to listen to the glib remarks of my companion, who was humorously dilating on the many original characteristics of the native at home, though to my way of thinking he cuts a much more comical figure abroad.

We had by this time entered the well-packed native quarter. Here innumerable streets branched off in all directions. The road was

crowded with naked children and half-naked men and women, but with a flourish of his whip and a hoarse shout our driver was in among them, scattering them, clacking like a flock of geese. It was at that moment I felt a sudden lightness in the region of my head, and on putting up my hand I found my hat was gone.

‘Hi! stop, stop!’

The words were scarcely out of my mouth before we had pulled up with a clatter in the midst of the rabble. Springing to my feet and looking over the back of the trap, I saw, with a feeling akin to nervousness, that the person who had thus unceremoniously relieved me of my headgear was my friend the coolie. I motioned for him to advance, but instead of doing so he defiantly waved the prize above his head, as though challenging me to come and fetch it.

‘I guessed he was up to no good,’ said my companion consolingly. ‘The chap’s a thief.’

It needed no great puzzling of the brain to arrive at that conclusion. If I hadn’t been a fool I might have known it long before.

Our coachman, whom we had heard mutter an occasional word of broken English, here ejaculated, 'Yessir—at thief.'

I sprang from the carriage and made as though I would accept the rogue's challenge, but he no sooner saw me advance than he dashed down one of the numerous alleys with inconceivable speed.

'No good,' cried my companion, 'come back. You'd lose sight of him before you'd gone a hundred yards.'

Feeling the truth of this, I reluctantly returned, longing with an unchristian ardour to lay my hands upon the heathen's body.

Pushing my way through the grinning crowd, I managed to make the driver understand that I wished to purchase a new hat. 'Yessir, oh, yessir,' he replied, and waving his whip aloft he screamed shrilly at the people, who, displaying much wisdom, rapidly fell back. As the excitable little pony plunged forward I took a last look round, and there at the top of the alley-way stood my friend the coolie swinging my new *terai* above his head.

Our friend from the consulate dined with us that night, and during the meal some one

incidentally referred to my adventure of the morning. The consul laughed.

‘Awfully sorry I forgot to tell you,’ he said, ‘but hat-snatching is a very lucrative profession here in Bangkok. It’s odd, though, that the beggar should have waited as he did and almost invite pursuit. It’s usually a snatch and a dash down some alley almost before you have time to catch your breath. I assure you I never heard of anything like it.’

‘That is the least singular part of the affair,’ I answered. Then I told them all how the thief had come to me in the morning, how he had left the coin lying on the ground, and how he had subsequently followed the carriage.

The man from the consulate opened his eyes.

‘Singular, indeed,’ he said. ‘I confess I can’t quite make it out. By the way, do you carry a revolver?’

‘I have one, though I never carry it.’

‘If I were you I should while I remained in Bangkok.’

‘You don’t mean——’

‘I don’t mean anything, old chap. You’ll feel more secure, that’s all.’

That night I locked my door before going to

bed, and in my half-waking moments I had blurred visions of a brown-skinned coolie careering madly along the dusty roads, under a column of many-coloured hats as high as the dome of St. Paul's.

On entering the room next morning I should not have been at all surprised to find that my rascally friend had called on me, or left a card intimating where I might pick up second-hand hats very cheap. I was quite prepared to believe that the fellow was capable of any impertinence; and when I found that he had not condescended to call, my disappointment was extreme. He was not even out on the frontage by the river, a state of things which suggested a fly and an immediate setting out in search of him. But, joking apart, the mysterious behaviour of the man had appealed to me in spite of my better reason. There was a sense of suggestion, of incompleteness, about the whole business which prevented me from passing on to other things; and try as I would I could not banish from my mind the man or his singular behaviour. What that behaviour portended I had not the remotest idea. I had my own doubts as to his wish to inflict bodily

harm on me, for, unless the man were mad, how could he wish to injure one against whom he could possibly have no grudge? Nevertheless, I took the advice of my friend from the consulate about carrying a revolver. There is much wisdom in a state of readiness.

That night we attended the magnificent ceremony of the burning of the king's mother. She had died some months previously, and her son, having grown weary of sackcloth and ashes, had given the order for her cremation. Even the death of a queen must not entirely retard the progress of a nation. There were grand doings in the neighbourhood of the crematorium, which had been specially built for the illustrious dead ; and as I and my companions wandered in and out amid the throng, which showed up luridly by the fitful glare of the sputtering torches, I suddenly missed them, and for a moment or two stood irresolute looking to right and left. As I did so a native passed swiftly beside me, and so closely that I could almost swear he touched me. He took half a dozen quick steps, and then, swinging round on his heel, came towards me with a soft, swift, gliding movement. Indeed, by the

indifferent light, and dressed in white as he was, he seemed more like a spectre than a man. Not yet sure that it was I he sought, and failing to attach anything of importance to his movements, I seemed only half-aware of his proximity before he was upon me. Then like a flash he passed to the right of me and I felt my hat go.

Springing round with an oath, I savagely grasped my revolver, but was only in time to see a white figure mingle with a group of other white figures. Nothing daunted, I walked on in the direction the thief had taken, and presently seeing a form, which I thought resembled his, detach itself from the group, I kept it in sight. Of course I made no pretence of hurrying, not wishing to alarm the fellow, or cause a disturbance; and yet it was curious how that figure kept its distance from me. Whether I walked slow or fast, attempted a little run or a double, the thing was always before me like my shadow.

At last it led me to the top of a narrow, dark street, and, seeing me hesitate, it also hesitated. I was strongly tempted to pursue the thing, though my better sense warned me

of the folly of so doing. What could I hope to gain by such an adventure? I did not even know that the fellow was the one who had stolen my hat. And yet my temperament was such that I knew nothing but a solving of the mystery would satisfy me.

But here all doubts as to the identity of the man were set at rest, for seeing me hesitate, and fearing I would give up the pursuit, he boldly advanced to within a few yards of me and waved my hat in my face. I immediately sprang forward, hoping to seize him, but he was off with surprising agility, I after him. But a few yards of such going were enough to convince me of the danger of running in such a place, and at once slackening down I pursued him more leisurely. Apparently unconcerned, he too slackened his speed, and, keeping about a dozen yards ahead, he led me right through the dark, evil-smelling street.

Quite convinced now that the man was no ordinary thief, I was determined to see the adventure through. Perhaps I had my doubts about the wisdom of such an act, but my curiosity was stronger than my discretion. I had not the remotest idea where, or to what,

the man was leading me ; but in those days I had plenty of faith in myself, and perhaps not a little in my six-shooter. At any rate, I loosened that weapon and kept it ready to my hand, and left the rest to chance.

After traversing the aforementioned dirty street, my guide bore round to the left, and presently I thought I recognised on the other side of the road the walls of the barracks ; but, without stopping, the fellow led me to the right and then to the left, up one street and down another, till I abandoned all hope of fixing my whereabouts : though, by what I could make out of the surroundings, I seemed to be in a more substantially built part of the town.

Presently I found myself walking in the shadow of a high wall, my guide still the same distance before me. Something told me that we were approaching our destination, and instinctively my feet slipped less noisily over the ground. Then I saw my guide stop and hold up his hand, and, scarcely knowing what I did, I obeyed the gesture. Yet from where I stood I could see him fumbling about, apparently with the wall : then all of a sudden he disappeared.

Startled a little, I once more felt for my revolver, the touch of the steel having a reassuring effect on my agitated nerves. Then after waiting for half a minute or so to see if he would reappear, I advanced to the spot where I had last seen him, and behold, the cause of his vanishing was instantly explained. There was a stout wooden doorway let into the wall, and through this the spectre had passed.

I stood waiting, wondering, uncertain whether to advance or retreat. Thought upon thought counselling the utmost prudence pleaded with considerable eloquence: but in the hands of men and women prudence is like a piece of elastic, and may be conscientiously stretched to suit the occasion. The wall was grim, the door suspicious. In the open street there might be a chance, but behind that wall what hope was there for one man if mischief were meant him? And yet I was loth to forgo the adventure at what seemed to be its most critical point. Uncertainty there was in abundance, danger there might be, but I must get to the bottom of the business; and so, without more ado, I put my hand to the gate and pushed. It moved a little, but on pushing harder it

opened wide enough to allow me to slip through. This I did without further hesitation.

For a few moments I stood on the steps which led down from the gate, and peered intently into the darkness. That I was in some private grounds, or garden, I easily guessed, though the light that stole through the trees was fitful in the extreme. But presently out of the shadows the white form of my coolie friend appeared, and I immediately descended the steps and drew near. As I advanced the fellow salaamed most humbly, muttering beneath his breath something in an apologetic tone. Then with a still more elaborate bow he handed me my hat, and turning on his heel beckoned me to follow. This I did with alacrity, for I now began to wonder strange things.

But after going a few yards he stopped suddenly, uttered a low exclamation of annoyance, and then retraced his steps, motioning for me to do likewise. Wondering what new turn events had suddenly taken, I slipped my hand in my pocket, felt my revolver, and kept close to his heels. Unnecessary prudence.

The fellow had merely forgotten to lock the gate. I came suspiciously close as he did so, but, instead of evincing any concern, he took pains to show me how the thing was done. A heavy beam of wood, slipped through a huge staple in the door, and then into a recess in the wall, composed the mechanism; and though the ceremony interested me but little, the act of the coolie awoke in me renewed confidence. He grunted with satisfaction as the bar shot into its place, and then turning about motioned as before for me to follow him.

Down the narrow, smooth path we went, the man in his bare feet gliding noiselessly before me, I slipping along almost as quietly. Above, through the thin trees, I caught an occasional glimmer from the feeble stars, but, there being no moon, the night was very dark. And darker it grew all of a sudden, for without warning I found myself in the deep shadow of a huge mass of masonry. A house, I guessed, though whether it was house or wall I could not tell. Here my guide touched me gently on the arm and murmured something that seemed like a warning. I drew back a step further amid the shrubs that grew alongside the masonry,

and with eyes and ears alert awaited the next move.

I saw my friend the coolie flit hither and thither, noiselessly as a ghost; now he bent this way, now that, and, as far as I could make out, he was listening intently. But if he expected to hear anything he was disappointed, for nothing but the rustling of the leaves overhead, and an occasional moan of the wind, came to relieve the oppressive stillness. Then he came to me, and seizing me by the hand led me a few steps to the right, and then halted before a low door. This he opened noiselessly, and without more ado we entered, the man softly closing the door behind him.

We were now in complete darkness, and I began to entertain visions of traps, assassinations, and sundry other curious and alarming pictures; but the man still held my hand, and my pride forbade me to show any sign of doubt or fear. My forethought, however, had enabled me to give him my left hand, which allowed me to keep the right within easy reach of my revolver. I had fully made up my mind that if anything untoward happened, my coolie friend should pay for it. Perhaps he

paid dearly enough for it in the end, but in quite another way.

Despite the lightness of my tread, my footsteps rang hollowly as we walked, which proclaimed the nature of our path ; but presently those hollow sounds died away, and I felt my feet touch some soft carpet or matting. Here my conductor slipped from my side, and fearing some treachery I stepped back several paces till I felt the wall. I admit to the moment or two of suspense which followed, and then I noticed a feeble light to the left of me. It was the coolie who advanced with a small lamp in his hand.

Signalling me to follow him in silence, he led the way across the room, the outlines of which I could but indistinctly discern, at the further end of which hung a pair of heavy curtains. Parting these he disclosed a narrow staircase which led upward, and then stood aside holding the curtains for me to pass. I looked at him suspiciously, but he only smiled reassuringly and motioned for me to advance. Advance, yes, but where, to what? Again the fellow smiled, and again my instinct told me to trust him, though prudence cautioned me with no

uncertain voice. And then I almost laughed aloud as I thought. Prudence! what had I to do with such a quality? The moment I had given myself into the keeping of this coolie, prudence and I had parted company. Come what might I would see the thing through.

Up the stairs I went, the man holding the light above his head for me to see, and in a brief space I reached the top. Then the light was withdrawn, but I was no longer in darkness, for away before me, at the end of what appeared to be a long passage, I beheld a feeble glimmer. Towards this I immediately set out, my pulses now going at express speed. The air was warm here, and scented, and seemed to intoxicate me as I drew it in. Over the thick carpet my feet slipped noiselessly, and with a rapidity born of intense excitement I approached the lamp. It was then I saw that the passage apparently ended in a blind wall, but on getting closer I discovered that the supposed wall was a pair of heavy dark curtains which hung rigidly in their place.

That the lamp was meant as a guide I could not doubt, and yet I stood irresolute before those curtains wondering what the next step

would lead to. Then with a conscious throb of irritation I drew the curtains aside, and——

The room was low, dimly lighted, and full of rich perfume, the perfume that had almost made me drunk. Here and there were grim Oriental carvings, the designs of which cut fantastic capers in the strange light, and here and there were quaint Oriental seats, and hangings of curious designs in silver and gold. The light stole through the pink globe of a lamp which hung in the far corner, beneath which I saw a woman reclining amid a heap of rosy cushions. By the way her breast rose and fell I guessed she was asleep, though her manner of waking as I advanced, and her affected cry of alarm when she beheld me, gave me that confidence I might otherwise have lacked.

I bowed, drawing still nearer to her, muttering an apology for my intrusion, which, of course, she didn't understand, but which made not the slightest difference to me. Training demanded an expression of some sort, and if the lady didn't know what I meant she had not the usual acumen of her sex.

She rose as I advanced, and I recognised her in a moment. It was the same woman whom

I had seen dancing in the native theatre. She wore the same yellow dress : great gold bangles spanned her wrists and ankles, those ankles which, after all, were not so far off as heaven. She smiled as she saw I recognised her, and murmured something in a soft, low voice. I answered, and she listened intently while I spoke ; but when I finished she shook her head with a pathetic little smile. Yet under some conditions the eyes speak more eloquently than the tongue, and those conditions were with us at that moment.

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And so for the next three nights my coolie friend met me at the gate and escorted me to the bottom of the stairs as he had done on the occasion of my first visit. But on the fourth night there was no coolie escort awaiting me, though when I pushed the gate I found to my relief that it had been left unlocked. Though evidently called away on some other business, he had arranged everything for my easy entrance. Knowing the road so well by this time, I soon passed down the garden and entered the house by the little low door. Here I stood for several seconds listening intently ; but no

sound of a suspicious nature reaching me, I pursued my way.

The woman was waiting for me as before; the coffee in dainty little cups was spread on the richly inlaid table, the sweetmeats piled in dainty dishes beside it. She let an unconscious sigh of relief escape her as she saw me, and I thought she clung to me rather hysterically. Her big eyes shone excitedly, and nothing could assuage the rise and fall of her breast.

It happened like a flash. There was a sudden swish of the curtains to the right of us, and half a dozen men bounded into the apartment—mercenaries, I did not doubt. As I sprang to my feet and faced them they drew their knives as one man—long, ugly weapons like Malay creeses—and threatened me with instant annihilation. But finding the ferocity of their looks ineffectual, one of the men advanced a step, pointed to the woman, and said something. What it was I did not know, but I guessed easily enough. He wanted me to hand her over. The poor thing shrank trembling to my side and turned a pair of imploring eyes into mine. Had I been the most selfish of mortals I could not have resisted that mute appeal. I knew

enough of the inner life of the East to guess the fate of faithless women ; and recognising my obligations, I shook my head at the men and flung one arm round the quivering shoulders of the woman.

This act was answered in just the way I expected. It was the signal for an immediate advance on the part of the enemy ; but as they raised their feet for the second step, I brought my pistol to bear full on the leader's face. For a moment he did not seem to recognise the weapon, but when he did he fell back with a cry of rage. The others huddled together in a heap behind him, and seemed to be in deadly terror lest I should let fly. But such was not my intention unless close pressed : then it was a case of save himself who could.

Seeing the marked effect my revolver had upon them, I resolved to test its moral influence to the full. Acting upon that excellent intent, I moved slowly towards the curtain through which I had entered, still keeping the woman by my side. When close pressed, and in desperate straits, we must, if we would fight our way out, think quickly and act with boldness and precision. It was evident that I

could not leave the woman to the mercy of those hired ruffians ; it was also evident that I could not expect to remain long in that place without violence of some sort being directed against me. True, I didn't know where I could take her, or what I should do for her if rescued. Indeed, I never thought anything about it. My one fixed idea was to save her from the fury of her persecutors.

They watched my movements with stealthy glances, my boldness not a little disconcerting them ; but, as I had their captain covered, and as he feared to move, none of the others attempted an advance. On the contrary, three of them retreated slowly till they were right against the curtain which shielded their entrance, and as I watched I saw them disappear behind it. For a moment, but for a moment only, I congratulated myself. Then I knew that another and a worse danger threatened me. The three men whom I thought my pistol had terrified had either gone to alarm the house or to cut off my retreat. This fact the woman seemed to grasp as soon as I. She uttered a quick exclamation and pointed excitedly to the exit.

Immediately turning my attention to it I began a cautious if quick retreat; but our assailants, fearful that we should make good our escape before their companions intercepted us, bounded forward as at a given signal. I fired full at the leader, but in the excitement missed my aim, or, at least, did nothing but tear a hole through his ear. With a howl of pain he sprang at me, and, though I brought him to the floor with my second shot, he ran his knife into my thigh as he fell. Then, like a pair of devils, the other two were upon me, and though I fired once, twice, I failed to hit them in any vital part. A knife flashed before my eyes—indeed, it seemed to be almost in my face before I saw it. And yet my hand went up, and the sharp steel rang on the barrel of my revolver, knocking that weapon from my hand. The man immediately closed with me, and then began a fierce struggle to see which should throttle the other.

Round and round the room we went, sending a table spinning here, a bench there, I moving rapidly with the object of giving the other fellow no opportunity of striking me. He circled round and round me with his weapon

ready to stab, I using as best I could his companion as a shield. But at length, being pressed close, I stumbled over a low divan, and both I and my opponent went flying to the floor.

Now began a struggle to see, not which should get uppermost, but which should secure the bottom place ; for like a flash of inspiration came the warning that the underneath position would be the safer. Unfortunately, in falling, I had thought only of getting my opponent beneath me, and this, to my confusion, I succeeded in doing. It was when I wished to reverse this state of things that the struggle came. But it did not last long. With a quick movement the fellow caught me by the arms ; I saw his companion dash forward ; I almost fancied I could feel the knife entering my back. Instead of that there came a sharp, agonising shriek, and the would-be assassin lurched forward on his face some three or four yards away. Surprised, I threw my opponent off and sprang to my feet, and behold ! the woman was my deliverer. There she stood with the dripping knife in her hand, a look of fearful exultation in her eyes. She saw the look of gratitude in mine, and her wild face brightened.

But there was no time for words, nor looks neither. Stooping, I picked up my revolver, and also possessed myself of my would-be assassin's knife. As for the fellow with whom I had wrestled, there was nothing further to fear from him. He was lying insensible, with mouth and eyes open, breathing stertorously. With a quick gesture I called the woman to my side, and together we quitted the chamber.

Beyond the curtain the passage was in darkness, but the woman seized my hand and hurriedly led me forward. Knowing every inch of the way as she did, I could not have had a better guide. Onward we went over the soft carpet at a rapid pace, down the stairs of which I have already spoken, and so on through the passage in which I recollected that my steps echoed strangely. Then, almost before I was aware we had reached it, she flung open the low door which gave admittance to the house, and, ere I could restrain her, sprang out into the grounds. At the same moment three white forms flitted out from the surrounding shadows, and three cruel knives went stab, stab, stab into her bare breast. With scarcely a moan she fell back in my arms

the blood gushing out from the three separate wounds. That the blows were meant for me I did not doubt, and at that moment I almost regretted that the assassins had made a mistake.

Lifting the poor girl's head in my arms, I tried to staunch the awful flow of blood ; but she was already in the last fearful gasp. Even as I held her head I felt it grow suddenly heavy.

The assassins, having done their work, fled I know not whither. Without further molestation I reached the gate, passed out, and left the dead girl to the care of the gods.

HIS JAPANESE WIFE

SO-CALLED men of honour are notoriously dishonourable where women are concerned. As man to man they savour much of self-sufficiency; as man to woman they wear quite another coat. But in the Far East such things matter little, and the native woman doesn't count. She may have a soul to save, but we doubt it. Heaven knows, her own men think little enough of her: we think less. She may have brothers and sisters, a mother—a husband, perchance. It is really no affair of ours. To those who stay at home in England and sentimentally ponder over the magnificent self-sacrifice of the missionaries, their loyalty, steadfastness, and devotion to a hopeless cause, the life of the ordinary young fellow in the East may come as something of a shock. But trust the ordinary young fellow for knowing what he is about. When he do n't, he makes what the world calls a hideous failure of his life.

Cuthbertson was such a failure, and those who knew him are never likely to tread in his steps. Nobility is a transcendent virtue when it doesn't cost you anything : in Cuthbertson's case it was a deplorable vice. The preacher will tell us that we are all brothers : he knows very well that we are nothing of the kind. Custom is a barrier through which the blood of brotherhood may trickle, but which it can never surmount. Nor need we go to the East to find comparisons.

Cuthbertson was what is commonly called a 'good sort'—in the best sense of the term. The man, without being in the least degree priggish, was thoroughly honest ; and if he never indulged in our excesses, he could take his whisky-and-soda with the best of us. A spruce, tidy fellow, with a thoughtful dark face and a pair of exceedingly pathetic eyes. I confess I always had a sneaking regard for him ; and though some of the younger fellows thought he gave himself superior airs, I think I understood him. The difference between us was merely one of balance : of course we knew on whose side the deficiency lay.

So far he had managed to steer pretty clear

of the women, which, to our way of thinking, was anything but an agreeable sign. Nor did we forget to let him know it: but he only shook his head and smiled. The pathetic eyes may have looked a shade more pathetic: for the rest, the man was unassailable.

As a rule he sat at the head of our mess, and I must admit that, undemonstrative as he was, his presence acted beneficially upon us. There were no assumed airs, no little bits of consequence peeping out; but all the same we knew that Cuthbertson's eyes were upon us, and we guessed that the brain behind was summing us up, and not unfairly. There was at least one man in Yokohama who had the whip-hand of our human frailties.

Then came the night when he suddenly announced his intention of severing his connection with the mess, and very politely requested us to elect another chairman. He was going to move into new quarters, he said, and begged that we would sometimes give him a kindly thought. Of course we drank his health and declared that he was the jolliest of jolly fellows; and he made a very neat and suitable speech, to which two or three of our

members attempted a reply ; but Cuthbertson's easy effort put their stammering to the blush.

The next night his chair was empty. Much as we, in a silent way, resented his superiority, I think we missed him a good deal when he left—more, in fact, than any of us would care to admit ; but we elected another chairman in his place, and the world went on spinning just the same.

In the meantime it leaked out that he had taken a neat little cottage on the Bluff, and that he had a pretty little Jap to keep house for him. Of course we smiled significantly at the latter piece of information, surprised and yet not surprised ; though we protested that he had stolen a most unjustifiable march upon us. And yet I think he went up several degrees in our estimation. We like other fellows to possess our own manly attributes.

He bore the subsequent chaff well enough. Sometimes I thought he flushed painfully, at others his curious brown eyes flashed sudden sparks of fire—real resentful fire that almost seemed to scorch. But that was when the remarks ran too freely on the housekeeper.

After all, it was nobody's business but his own, and a man's housekeeper need not necessarily be old and ugly. Accident may occasionally unearth a fairly presentable one, and when it does, what is man that he should run counter to the gods? We, however, failed most lamentably in our endeavours to get an introduction. Cuthbertson smiled affably enough at the suggestion, and even went so far as to say that he would see about it; but we knew that he never entertained the notion for a moment. It was always, 'Some day, old chap'—the day that never comes.

Perhaps it was scarcely consistent with our exalted notions of honour, but we determined by hook or by crook to get a peep at Cuthbertson's mysterious housekeeper. We thought, apart from our knowledge of the uses to which housekeepers are put, that there was something underhand in this particular engagement; but for a long time the secret, if there were one, baffled us. None of us was ever asked to the cottage to dinner, though occasionally a fellow from the office went up to tiffin. But eyes were strained in vain, ears kept vainly on the alert. The housekeeper knew how to send

in a good tiffin, and also how to keep herself out of sight.

But one Sunday afternoon, happening to be in the neighbourhood of the cottage, I thought I would look Cuthbertson up and give him the time of the day. Filled with this friendly intention, I approached the house. His boy met me on the verandah, and in answer to my inquiries informed me that his master had just gone out, but that he was expected back every moment. Would I be condescending enough to enter and wait for him?

‘Oh no,’ I answered; ‘never mind. Tell Mr. Cuthbertson I called.’ But scarcely had I turned before my mind was changed. Swinging round with a suddenness that quite startled the boy, I told him that I had changed my mind, that I would stay till the master returned. The fellow looked at me in his sleepy Oriental way, but without more ado led me into the parlour.

The fact is, I had suddenly remembered the housekeeper, and I was not without some curiosity respecting her. It was no business of mine to pry into my friend’s private affairs; but if fate threw the housekeeper in my way,

who was I that I should resist the will of the gods?

It was a cheerless little room, I thought, though the sun streamed in from the sea, and the plum-blossoms filled the air with sweetness. The furniture was all good, but there was a half-Oriental tone about it which reminded one forcibly of the distance between the East and the West. There were few knick-knacks about; though here and there some exquisite *kakemonos* (scroll-paintings) showed up the incongruity of their surroundings. I saw none of the soft touches of the Western woman's hand. All was severely plain, cold, and comfortless. I could not help contrasting it with the rooms I had once known so well—poor little rooms with furniture none too new, but which the loving hands of mother and sisters had made so warm and homelike. There was nothing of home about this. Signs there were of easy circumstances: neatness was the order of the day; but not a chair nor a cushion was out of its place. Everything was prim, proper, and horribly clean.

Several minutes must have passed with me deep in reflection, and yet there was no sign

of Cuthbertson, or his housekeeper. Not a sound was heard about the place. The boy, I had no doubt, was lazily dozing somewhere; the housekeeper, most probably, had gone on a visit to her mother. If Cuthbertson had any one else in the house, I was not aware of it.

At last, flattering myself that I had shown exemplary patience, I rose, yawned, stretched my limbs, and began to wander round the apartment. True, Cuthbertson was a decent enough sort of fellow, and in a way I was very fond of him, but I was not inclined to waste all the precious moments of my life in the uncertain hope of beholding him. So, feeling somewhat annoyed, I prepared myself a cigar, seized my hat, and was about to sally forth, when I heard the swish, swish of sandals on the soft matting outside. Hastily slipping the cigar in my pocket, I drew back against the door, and presently in walked a little native woman in a white kimono patterned with broad leaves in red. Without appearing to notice me, she toddled straight over to the window, against which she rested, staring dreamily out to sea.

For a few moments irresolution checked all

action, and then, with a slight cough, I made my presence known. She uttered a little cry, and confronted me with a look of considerable alarm. The agitation flushing her face made her look very pretty, and I began mentally to congratulate Cuthbertson on the excellence of his taste. Rumour had not belied her. She was an extremely interesting housekeeper.

But my first endeavour was to quiet her fears, and this I speedily accomplished by keeping my distance and explaining the cause of my visit. At first I thought she looked incredulous, the native woman being ever suspicious of the European ; but when I explained how the boy had shown me in, she smiled faintly, said Mr. Cuthbertson was expected every moment, and looked as though she very much wished to relieve me of her presence. This utter lack of vanity on her part affected me to a singular degree. Nor was it wholly without a certain influence on my immediate decision. Here was I, at last, face to face with the mysterious housekeeper ; and, knowing how little in this world is won by delicacy, I was not inclined to flatter that excellent superstition.

Undoubtedly Cuthbertson's taste was excellent. A finer girl he might have found with little difficulty, a greater beauty; but as a feminine combination she had not a few good points. Evidently a connoisseur of female beauty, the little he had had to do with women had taught him to look for the best. Indiscriminate admiration of the fair sex is a most commendable quality, but our admiration is for the man who can pick and choose—the man who holds his dignity as a thing of considerable value, his affection as an honour not lightly to be bestowed. Cuthbertson had kept himself aloof to some purpose.

At length I succeeded in quieting her fears, or, at least, in showing her that I had no violent designs on her plump person. I won't go so far as to say that my eyes did not attempt to sound her, shocking as the confession may seem; but the eyes, like all inflammable matter, are only dangerous when they touch. She, however, appeared capable of entertaining an inconceivable amount of modest eye-play, and after a while began to work her own slanting orbs in quite a coquetish manner. At all events, I imagined it as

such, though, on the other hand, it may have been meant as a display of Oriental diffidence. The foreigner in his sublime self-consciousness is apt to shock the thinking native, and the dazzled eye may even take for encouragement that which was meant for a reproof.

Actions viewed in certain lights present a disagreeable appearance ; but if we twist about and get round to the other side, it is ten to one we begin to qualify and excuse. The facilities for falling are numerous ; the facilities for rising are few. But there is the mean course. Ah, well, the mean course never yet took any one to heaven.

I candidly admit my insincerity, leaving those who will take the trouble to think out the position to imagine what they like. I have only to record that when Cuthbertson entered the room he found his housekeeper and me making excellent progress.

I flush deeply at the recollection, but I flushed deeper as I saw him standing there in the doorway. The woman, who had been but a half-willing accomplice, sprang from my side with a little cry of alarm, and, clutching the back of a chair that stood near, hung her head

penitently. I turned to Cuthbertson with a confused look and a half-smiling apology on my lips; but the smile died from my face and the flippancy from my tongue as I perceived the gravity of his countenance. Always stern, he now seemed a very Daniel come to judgment.

‘Well,’ said he with wonderful self-restraint, ‘what does all this mean?’

I hadn’t courage enough to say outright, so I began to stammer some worthless excuse which, no doubt, he rightly regarded as insolent in the extreme.

‘I understand,’ said he, cutting short my explanation with masterful gravity. ‘Such conduct is quite compatible with your notions of honour. Friend and foe are alike equal victims to your honourable scruples.’

I bowed, though inwardly writhing beneath his censure. I felt that he was still the better man of the two, and the feeling angered me.

‘Pooh,’ I answered indifferently, ‘we’re getting mighty moral in Japan in these days.’

‘It’s not so much a question of morals,’ he replied; ‘a subject I should never think of

broaching with you—as it is one of mere blackguard honour.’

‘Blackguard honour?’

‘That honour of which blackguards unceasingly boast.’

‘My dear fellow, if you will cage your pretty bird you must expect people to come and peep through the bars.’

A flush of real anger darkened his serious face, and I saw him press his lips tightly to keep in the hot words that bubbled to his tongue.

‘Perhaps I had better explain,’ he said quietly, his voice seemingly half-choked with emotion. ‘That woman is my wife.’

‘Yes,’ I replied, affecting deep contrition. ‘My dear Cuthbertson, I am quite ashamed of myself.’

I saw him shiver as though my words had fallen on him like a whip.

‘You are mistaken,’ he answered quickly. ‘This woman is not my mistress.’

I saw the truth in his eyes, but it gave me such a shock that I could only gasp out, ‘Married? You have married her?’

‘I have.’

‘Good God!’

‘Why should you say that?’

‘I beg your pardon. It is your own affair. I should like you to believe, though, that I never suspected this.’

He looked hard at me for a moment or two, and then said, ‘Perhaps we were both a trifle hasty. One cannot always avoid a breach of good manners. But, if you don’t mind, I should like you to give me an explanation of the look of horror that came into your face just now when you heard of my marriage.’

‘It was a shock,’ I answered feebly.

‘Why should it be?’

‘Really, Cuthbertson——’

‘I should like to know. If you will pardon me saying so, you are a very tolerable representative of the world, and I should like to hear the world speak.’

‘It has a harsh voice sometimes—a cold, hard, brutal voice. Pity it knows not, nor shame, nor truth—except when it censures the fallen.’

‘And what does it say of me?’ The man’s anxiety stood out at every point, notwithstanding his seeming indifference.

‘What if it were to say that you had ruined yourself?’

‘I should reply that it was merely a matter of opinion.’

‘But what if it is no matter of opinion? what if it is a terrible fact?’

He watched me steadily, his whole existence in his eyes. I saw his under-lip quiver in spite of his strenuous endeavours to keep calm.

‘I think you overstate the case,’ he said. ‘Why should I not have married this woman?’

‘Why not, indeed? All men are brothers.’

‘I admit the prejudice,’ he went on, totally ignoring my remark. ‘We may degrade a thousand of these women, but we must not raise one. Raise, good God! Such is our Western morality here among these simple folks, these folks whom we hope to impress with our great principles. Yet if I disobey this law and do a just deed, I am to be punished for it?’

‘Even unto the third and fourth generation. My dear Cuthbertson, the mere fact of your having kept this marriage secret tells its own tale. Prejudice, truly, nothing but prejudice. But do you know how strong this prejudice can be?’

‘In short, a state of immorality is preferable to one of clean living?’

‘Much, under certain conditions—if you wish to retain the favour of the world. It will forgive anything but a mistake.’

‘And I have made a mistake?’

‘Socially, you have dug your own grave.’

As he showed me to the door, he said, ‘I cannot think you speak with authority. Why should society ban me for doing the right thing?’

‘Society is never guilty of such a mistake ; the difference is this : the right thing must be that of which society approves. Of course you no longer wish this affair to be kept secret?’

‘No. I am sorry I have kept it secret for so long.’

We saw little of him after this ; for once the marriage was known, the curse began to work. While he was supposed to have a pretty little Jap keeping house for him, he was a tolerable enough fellow in the eyes of those who couldn’t afford such a luxury, and even the women spoke admiringly of that wicked Mr. Cuthbertson ; but when it became known that that Jap was his wife all the interest in his doings

evaporated. The fellows called him a fool, with sundry embellishments ; the women rarely breathed his name. He was passed in the street with a curt nod : oftener with averted face. The man who had been guilty of such a fearful mistake was utterly beyond the reach of mercy. Forgiveness might be almost stretched to bursting point, but discretion dared venture no further. The houses that knew him once, knew him no more. The decent fellow had sunk to the wretched outcast.

As for Cuthbertson, he bravely faced the music for a long time. There was a lot of quiet determination about the man, and, being wroth with the world, he bore its pettiness with a philosophic calm which was highly creditable. Manfully he set his face in the direction in which he believed his duty lay. In business, he was the same thoughtful, courteous man that he had always been : to all appearance he went his way in the same unobtrusive, methodical manner. In his eyes he had done an honourable thing in marrying this native woman ; and if the world could not see his act in the same light, so much the worse for the world. Had he been a swindling bankrupt, a

ruthless destroyer of women's lives, false to his friends and his God, he would have found many to make smooth his descent: as he was only a fool who thought that what he was doing would be pleasing in the sight of heaven, he was quietly left to the care of the angels. When that happens to a man, he generally fares badly.

Cuthbertson was no exception to the rule. Since the day he found his wife in the arms of another, his confidence in her was shaken; and though he may have had no just cause for suspecting her, his ignorance made his suspicions none the less acute. Then a son and heir was born to him, a little ugly, pig-eyed Jap which he could scarcely look upon without loathing. The wife's mother brought it to him with pride beaming in her eyes, for the advent of a son is a great event in Oriental families; but he only waved her away with a curse. The hideous little monkey was no child of his—he would swear it on a thousand bibles; and weeks passed before he could summon up courage enough even to look at it. When he did he saw the enormity of the crime he had committed.

From that time his life began its downward

course. A dangerous melancholy settled upon him; he was neglectful of his person, uncertain in business. When he was at home, he wore sandals and an old kimono; when he went abroad, he looked like a Japanese dressed in badly-fitting European clothes. His eyes, once so serious, grew furtive, wild, excited; the man who was once so sure of himself now stumbled and hesitated in a most painful manner. Then he got fits of melancholy, and for hours would sit with his head in his hands, moaning to himself, or gnashing his strong white teeth. Some said drink was the cause of it, but I think it was not all drink. There was a sadness in his eyes that drink could never claim.

Sometimes, they said, he had his moments of reaction. Then the degradation of his life would assail him with such vehemence that he would spring to his feet and cry pitifully that he was a white man, a white man, and that his place was beside the best white men in the land. While the frenzy lasted he was full of the noblest resolutions. He would retrieve the position he had lost; he who ruled once should rule again. They should kow-tow to him as in the days gone by.

Poor Cuthbertson ! Those days never came. The frenzied resolutions were merely frenzied resolutions. In the midst of one of his noblest fits he saw his little half-breed child crawl in at the door and look steadfastly up at him with its ugly, pig eyes, those eyes which seemed to cry out mockingly, 'No, you are not a white man. You lost all right to that title when you degraded yourself. You are my father, and I am only a mongrel.' Then the man in him straightway withered ; the bowed head sank beneath the trembling hands, and the desolate moan went up to the desolate sky, 'O God ! O God !'

Gradually the ostracism became general. He lived as a native, dressed, spoke as one. Only at rare intervals was he seen. Then people told of a man with a bent back and rugged beard and hair who shuffled along in the dark murmuring drunkenly to himself. Indeed, most of us had almost forgotten that such a man as Cuthbertson had ever existed, when one morning some sampan men found his dead body floating in the sea, just off the English Hatoba.

‘PULO CONDORE’

EVERYBODY has heard how the *Pulo Condore* went down in the China Seas with two hundred and thirty souls aboard ; but everybody does not know how it happened. Oh yes, there were full particulars published in all the newspapers, and as a rule your newspaper is fairly accurate ; but in this instance it never guessed the true cause of the catastrophe, or, if it did, it very generously suppressed it. There was plenty of information about typhoons, those windy furies which are almost sure destruction to a certain class of ship ; there were thrilling accounts of the engineers striving heroically to stay the inrush of water to the engine-room, but striving vainly. Then came the vivid description of the helpless rolling in the trough of the sea and the inevitable foundering. Yes, the typhoon is a bad thing to meet, especially if you are deep-laden, or have to depend on

canvas ; but on this occasion the typhoon was not primarily responsible for the loss of the *Pulo Condore*, though one was raging in the immediate vicinity at the time. She really struck on one of the Linchoten Group of the Loo Choo Islands during the gale.

How do we know? Well, all those who have not quite forgotten the incident may remember that of the entire passengers and crew only the second mate and two firemen were saved. The latter, of course, would know nothing of the navigation of the ship, but the second mate has been whispering some strange things among his friends ; the rest of the story has been welded link by link.

The *Pulo Condore* was an iron screw-steamer of some three thousand tons register, and ran under the flag of the well-known ‘Pulo Line,’ which plies between the Chinese and Japanese ports. No smarter vessel of her class breasted those treacherous seas ; nothing local could beat her in the matter of speed, and even the big mail-boats from Europe had to fire up to show her a clean pair of heels. That she was therefore a favourite on the route might go without saying, her long years of faithful service

and her house-flag guaranteeing all that the ocean traveller cherishes. As a consequence she rarely left either side without a fair complement of passengers. To this fact may be set down the appalling loss of life.

Her commander was one Captain Richard Muirley, a name well known on the coast and thoroughly respected. Not loved, perhaps, because Muirley was not a lovable man, being a somewhat gloomy, morose sort of fellow; but he was a man in whose care the most nervous shipper would trust his most precious freight. It was said that he knew every inch of the China Sea—every island, every sunken rock, every sandbank. And as for typhoons, he had personally encountered more of those monsters than had any other dozen skippers lumped together. A sallow, sullen-faced man into whose yellowy-black complexion the very atmosphere of the East had entered. Stunted somewhat in growth, and thick with good living, he was not an attractive person. Off his ship you might have taken him for a superior artisan: on the bridge, however, he was not quite so contemptible; and once he looked almost great. But that is to come.

As the rules of the company forbade the captain to take his wife with him, Muirley set his better-half up in a pretty little house on the Bluff at Yokohama, and there, every three weeks or so, though occasionally for longer periods, he managed to put in a few days. Then Mrs. Muirley used to go aboard nearly every day to lunch, and merry little afternoon teas were held in the captain's cabin; but they must have seemed long, lonely weeks to the wife while her husband was steaming south; and if in the society the settlement afforded she sought relaxation, who could blame her? It was what any young and pretty woman might be expected to do. And Mrs. Muirley was decidedly pretty—as fair as her husband was dark, as slender as he was thick. Indeed, some of the boldest of her admirers even went so far as to draw comparisons, and wonder: eventually she grew to wonder herself.

Muirley was not a society man, and his profession debarred him from ever aspiring to be one; but he could not with reason object to his wife's little social triumphs, though in his heart he may have viewed them with some

slight misgiving. Still, they must have been long, dull weeks for her while he was away at sea ; moreover, Yokohama was not a furiously fast place—at least, not in one sense. When he heard the first whispers of her popularity, he was not sure of the throb that sent his pulses forward with a giddy motion, but he afterwards convinced himself that it was one of pleasure. A man is always pleased to possess a fascinating wife. He knows how other men will envy him : he never seems to think of the danger of that envy.

Of all Mrs. Muirley's friends, male or female, the one her husband liked best was a certain Mr. Poynings, a well-to-do merchant in the settlement ; and, singular as it may seem, Poynings often declared that Muirley was a man entirely after his own heart ; and whenever the skipper was in port, the merchant invariably strolled round of an evening to smoke a cigar with him and retail the 'latest news. And there was no man who knew more of what was going on in social Yokohama than this same Mr. Poynings.

But unfortunately there were other retailers of news as well, and in the course of time it

came to the captain's ears that his friend Poynings was rather more of a Lothario than a man with a pretty wife should know, especially when that pretty wife has to be left alone for weeks together.

It was strange, and of course absurd, but the more Muirley thought of his position the more unsatisfactory he found it. He half admitted to himself that, perhaps, he was hardly the man to charm a woman's heart: no man can wholly admit such a thing. Searching his conscience, he knew that he had been good to her in his own rough way: he did not quite comprehend the singular unattractiveness of his style. He always felt their parting keenly, though the knowledge that it was only for a little while tempered its severity. He admitted to the glow of pleasure which the first glance of Fusi-Yama gave him as he came up from the south. It would be folly to say he had not thought of the risk he ran in leaving his young wife so much alone; but to think ill of one's own folk is the last ignominy of the depraved mind; and whatever Muirley's faults may have been, he had his share of the sailor's generosity.

But faith does not necessarily mean blindness, and he began to doubt. Not that Poynings was not extremely circumspect; not that Mrs. Muirley forgot herself for a moment. Indeed, that little lady was the pattern of what a charming wife should be; but in a moment of sentimentality, after they had pledged each other in sundry whiskies-and-sodas, Poynings, growing confidential, assured Muirley that he thought that worthy mariner was the luckiest dog in the world; and, upon the mariner pressing for an explanation, the merchant enumerated several blessings of which he was cognisant, among the chief of which was the captain's wife. Then the detective which is in us all here began a further probing and prying; but try as he would, Muirley could get nothing more out of his friend. When they shook hands that night the merchant knew that his friend had altered.

Muirley must have thought that his wife needed a change very badly. At any rate he took her down to Hong-Kong with him, having, as a favour, obtained permission from the company. But, singular to relate, when Mr. Poynings knew that Mrs. Muirley was

going to Hong-Kong, he determined to pay his long-deferred visit to that city ; and on the morning that the *Pulo Condore* steamed out of Yokohama Bay she had on board the very man her master wished to leave behind.

The voyage down passed with little of moment. Poynings was, perhaps, somewhat attentive to the captain's wife, but it was the attention of an old friend, and as such could not, or should not, be misconstrued. Muirley may not have liked it, being in the unenviable state of doubting his best friend ; but there was absolutely nothing in the acts of Poynings to which he could reasonably take exception. His wife was, if possible, more charming than ever.

After a stay of five days in Hong-Kong, the ship pointed her nose northwards once more, having on board, among other passengers, Mrs. Muirley and Mr. Poynings. Up to the last moment the merchant had not thought it possible that he would be able to get his business through in time to enable him to catch the ship, though he confessed that he should strain every nerve to do so. The captain, listening attentively, said nothing ;

but inwardly he prayed that Mr. Poynings might not catch the ship, that Mr. Poynings might never leave Hong-Kong, or that he might never see Japan again. Vain prayer, vain hope! Even as the *Pulo Condore* was preparing to slip her buoy, a sampan was seen hurriedly approaching, and, almost at the last moment, Mr. Poynings clambered aboard.

The rest had better be told in the words of the second officer :

‘I had seen Mr. Poynings come tumbling aboard, and felt sorry for the captain. Of course we all knew what was going on ; in fact, the whole affair had been a subject of conversation among us during the voyage down. Some twitted the old man with not caring, and spoke of Mr. Poynings’ great wealth ; one suggested this and another suggested that, but not one of them suggested that it was driving the old man mad. He was quiet, he did not interfere in any way : therefore he was callous. But I could see the change working in him, and I feared the explosion which I knew must come. When it did, it would be the bursting of no ordinary squib.

‘Always a morose, sullen sort of fellow, his moroseness increased tenfold as we made our way north. He rarely spoke to a soul, and whenever he gave one of us officers an order, it was in a voice like the low growling of a bear. His eyes grew wild and bloodshot, and for hour after hour he glued himself up in the weather corner of the bridge, when for all the use he was he might just as well have been below enjoying a quiet snooze. But that was the strangest thing about him : I don’t believe he slept at all during our journey northwards. I know that whenever I was about the decks, I saw him bobbing here and there like an old black cork on a stream, and the chief and the third had the same tale to tell. And all the while his face was growing more haggard, his eyes more fierce and gleaming. He ate little, but drank enormous quantities of brandy-and-soda, and smoked incessantly. But the curious thing was that he never appeared to get drunk, never even seemed in a state approaching drunkenness. Though, truth to tell, he spoke so little that it would be hard to say in what state he was.

‘All the way up the Formosa Channel, the north-east monsoon blew furiously in our teeth, and time after time we had to slow down in the big sea. At this period the old man rarely left the bridge, but with his nose poking over the weather-screen stared steadily ahead. Sometimes I thought he was dreaming; but whenever I ventured near him and his eyes met mine, I saw that the dreams he harboured were not of the most pleasant nature.

‘Of Mrs. Muirley and Poynings I can say little from personal observation, as neither was seen much on deck during the bad weather; but from what I heard I can gather that the old flirtation was going on in the old way, with, perhaps, a trifle more of recklessness, till at last it got so bad that the captain had to speak. It was the first time he had spoken to his wife of this thing which had caused him so many hours of excruciating agony, but she resented it so hotly that some exceedingly bitter words passed between them.

‘That very night the burst-up came. It would, perhaps, be unfair to give any one of the versions which were flying about next

morning ; but this much may be stated with safety. The old man, visiting his wife’s room in the early hours of the morning, surprised Mr. Poynings there ; and had it not been for the interposition of a couple of passengers from the next cabin, he would assuredly have killed the woman and her lover.

‘He came up on the bridge just before I was relieved at eight bells, and asked me a lot of long, rambling questions—questions which bore little on my duties as a navigating officer ; and though I was forced to note the oddness of the man, not knowing the cause of that oddness I believed the long-expected had come at last, and that he was really mad. Nor was it till some four hours later that the mate told me the whole story.

‘All that day he kept the bridge, taking his meals in the chart-room, or rather, I should say, having his meals brought there, for they were taken away again untouched. He did nothing but smoke and drink, smoke and drink. But there was the sickness of death in his pallid face, madness in his unsteady eyes.

‘At six bells that afternoon we sighted the

68 TALES OF THE FAR EAST

Loo Choos, the gale still sweeping furiously down on us from the north-east; and when I came up on the bridge and found that we were making straight for them, my surprise was great indeed; for not once during my six voyages with him had Muirley steered any other course than the usual one through the Van Diemen Strait. Still, there was no reason why he should not slip in among the islands if he liked, so I took up my position in the port corner of the bridge and watched. The old man was over on the starboard side. Now and again his voice reached me as he shouted, "port," "starboard," or "steady"; and when at last we got under the lee of a big island, which for a moment sheltered us from the horrible gale, he turned and beckoned me to him.

'As I drew near I saw the mad light gleaming in his eyes, and I could not stay the look of concern which rushed to mine. He saw it and began to chuckle hideously.

"This is what they call the Linchoten Group," he said, waving towards the islands; "a hell of a place for ships. The *Golconda* went down here—on this point round the

corner.” He stretched his hand towards a reef which was now opening up about half a mile off, over which the sea dashed and foamed in horrible confusion. “Fifteen hundred people went down in her, they say. God! what a drowning! what a drowning! How many should you think we have aboard of us?”

“Between two hundred and thirty and two hundred and forty,” I answered.

“Then we can give the *Golconda* hell?”

“We certainly have a greater responsibility.”

‘He laughed brusquely as he turned away.

“Did you say ‘port,’ sir?”

‘We were now fast approaching the reef on which the *Golconda* stranded. I could distinctly see the black, jagged rocks peeping up through the white foam, and we were apparently rushing straight upon them.

“No, I didn’t,” he answered sharply. “Are you navigating this ship, or am I?”

‘He laughed maliciously as he turned away from me, while I, feeling rather snubbed, went back to my corner. At all events, it was no fault of mine. If he ran his ship ashore he would have to answer for it.

‘Nearer and nearer we approached the reef, and yet no sign from the old man. I watched him narrowly, anxiously, and, seeing that destruction was inevitable unless something were immediately done, I, throwing discipline and discretion to the gale, shouted excitedly to the quartermaster, “Port—hard a-port!”

““No, no!” thundered the captain, “keep her as she is!” The breakers seemed almost under our bows as he spoke.

““But, sir——” I began, our danger making me reckless of consequences.

““Damn you!” he howled, shaking his fist in my face, “interfere with me, would you, you son of a——”

‘The words died away on his lips, for at that moment the vessel struck hard on the outer edge of the reef. A look of devilish glee shot over the skipper’s murky face. Then, turning to the man at the wheel, he said with a chuckle, “Now, quartermaster, you can port to hell if you like!”

““My God!” I cried, seizing him by the shoulder in my excitement, “you have done this purposely?”

‘He laughed a low, mad laugh of triumph as he shook me off, and springing towards the engine telegraph he signalled for the ship to go full speed astern.

‘Of the confusion that followed I need not stay to tell. As usual, the ship had not boats enough to carry all those aboard. In a few moments we knew the worst. The water was pouring into the vessel fast: she was not expected to float many minutes. Two of the lifeboats were swung out, and after considerable manœuvring were set free well laden with passengers; but the seas were so high that neither of them survived many moments. And all this time the vessel was rapidly sinking by the head.

‘The captain, leaving me in charge of the bridge, scrambled down the ladder and hurried away aft, and presently I saw him approaching, leading his wife by the hand. Mr. Poynings followed in the rear. Skilfully the old man picked his way along the crowded deck, pushing the clamouring people to right and left of him.

““This way,” I heard him say as he dragged his wife up the ladder; “this is the safest place

in the ship. You will be quite secure here, quite secure." And he huddled her in behind the screen on the port side, though, as the ship was now rolling broadside on, the screen offered little protection. Poynings followed and took up his position beside her. He was very pale, but beyond that seemed as much at home as if on land.

"See, the boats are putting off!" screamed the unhappy woman, her face ghastly with terror. "Why did you bring me here?"

"Because I want you to see all the fun," roared her husband; "because I want you to see all that you are going to hell to answer for!"

The woman hid her face in her hands and began to weep, but an angry look leapt to Poynings' eyes, and he clenched his teeth ominously.

"You are mad, Muirley," he cried.

"Yes, by God," bellowed the captain, "and it's you who've made me."

"I will answer to you when and where you please," shouted the lover, the wind necessitating such a manner of speech. "But the last boat is almost ready to put off. Let her go. We two can fight it out."

‘For answer the old man whipped a revolver out of his pocket. “If either of you moves, I shoot. Damn you!” he shouted madly, his face growing black with hate, “do you think I’ve done all this for nothing? No, by God! We all go to hell together!” And as he stood there flourishing his pistol, he seemed more like a fiend than a man.

‘The wife, burying her white face in her hands, fell on her knees before him; and there, with the spray dashing over her hair, the ship sinking beneath her, and one and all face to face with death, she prayed piteously for forgiveness, the salt of her eyes mingling with the salt of the ocean. What she said may easily be guessed, though all I could catch was, “Dick, Dick!” and, “Pardon, pardon!”

‘He leant forward and seized her roughly by the hand.

““Yes, I’ll pardon you!” he shouted, laughing hoarsely; “let us see if God will!” And with a shriller, fiercer outburst of mad laughter he pointed at the seething sea which was rapidly burying the ship. Then, looking round and seeing me, he beckoned me to him.

““She’ll be under in a minute,” he shouted.

“Run aft, lad, and jump. It’s your only chance. You haven’t a moment to lose.”

‘I was slow to act upon this advice, for I did not like leaving the woman to perish ; but knowing that the captain would shoot me without compunction if I offered to interfere—and, indeed, interference would now be useless—I slowly descended the ladder and made my way aft.

‘A last look I caught of them as I mounted the rail preparatory to flinging myself overboard. Erect in one corner, pale but defiant, stood Poynings, fearing death neither at the hands of God nor man ; the woman still knelt, her face in her hands as though to shut out the view of death ; while the captain, with feet firmly planted and revolver in hand, stood watching them both. Then I leapt into the sea.

‘When I had time to look about me, the *Pulo Condore* had disappeared.’

A NIGHT IN CANTON

FROM Hong-Kong we took the boat up to Canton, intending to do the sights of that salubrious city. Wills and I had long made up our minds to go and have a 'look see,' and it was mainly owing to a protracted cruise south, on which his ship had gone, that we had been obliged to defer the outing. True, I was not particularly intimate with him, having only met him in a promiscuous sort of way at the Hong-Kong Club; but as he was a junior lieutenant on board H.M.S. *Horrible*, he must necessarily be passed, though his 'boulder' qualities were as conspicuous as a church tower. Not that he was a 'boulder,' by any means, or a bad sort of fellow at heart; but he was a man of great stature and abnormal strength, which two qualities, coupled with a diabolical temper, made him a singularly unpleasant person to have any ill dealings with.

His bronzed, clean-shaven face looked as though it had been hewn out of brown granite by an amateur modeller ; but there were strength and resolution in its ugly outlines : the heavy, close-pressed brows were such as I should like to see in no enemy of mine.

We often used to laugh at such a fellow as Wills being only a junior lieutenant, for, if appearance went for anything, no post under that of admiral was big enough for him. Yet we feared greatly that all Wills's bigness lay in his big frame, and that his mind was lamentably out of proportion to his body. But this, while it could hardly have retarded his progress in the service, had no effect upon his geniality while ashore. Indeed, he was in every essential a capital fellow, when he wasn't drunk ; and, personally, I liked the blunt honesty of the man. There was a genuineness about it which, while it might set your fastidious nerves on edge, gave admittance to no doubt. He hated all subterfuge and double-dealing, all shams and pretence. He loathed 'side,' which in itself was quite enough to ruin his chances of promotion. He was one of those idiots who wouldn't wear gloves in winter though the

marrow in his joints froze. I never saw him in a greatcoat. Nobody, I believe, ever saw him in one. He laughed at the idea of a sailor donning oilskins and a sou'-wester: he despised such fopperies and effeminacy. I verily believe that Wills will turn out a great hero one of these days, for he has all the utter disregard of consequences which is generally supposed to belong to the very brave and the very foolish. Death or glory was Wills's motto.

Well, he went into ecstasies over the first view of the city fragrant. He, with all the sailor-like anxiety to get his feet on dry land, had been pacing restlessly up and down the deck during the whole of the passage up the river; for, however much your landsman may rave of the ocean, only from a mariner can you get a proper appreciation of the land.

'Ah,' he cried, as we drew near, and the city slowly began to unfold itself, 'this is something like a place, old man! None of your cursed conventionality, little god-almighty admirals, or any other social iniquities. Hong-Kong is much too civilised, too damned respectable. Give me a place like this, Hugh, old chap,

where a man may enjoy himself without let or hindrance.'

'Bah!' I answered, 'you don't know what you're talking about.'

'Don't I?' he replied. 'You wait till I get ashore.'

I looked at him inquiringly, but he only winked roguishly, and then walked abaft the funnel to light his pipe. I waited patiently till he came back, but he never condescended to favour me with any further information. There was, however, a leery look in his eye which did not take my fancy.

I must confess I was a bit afraid of Wills. It was not the first time, since I had left Hong-Kong, that I had doubted the wisdom of coming with him. Free of the discipline of his ship, he was like a lion loosed from its cage. While things went well, and the beast was unmolested, there was little danger; but once the tail-twisting began, there would be a heavy score to settle. I knew Wills well enough for that. He was a royal bully, but without an atom of fear. As for consequences—I don't believe his hot blood ever gave cool reason a chance. I had seen him wipe the floor with an

American skipper in the bar of the Hong-Kong Hotel, and though a dozen of the servants were called in to chuck him out, they did not seem to fancy the business well enough to attempt it. Such a fellow should not have been left rusting on the China station. Where England was giving and taking hard knocks—that is where Wills should have been.

As soon as we had made fast to the landing-stage, we procured an interpreter and a couple of chairs, each chair having four coolie bearers, and thus royally we set out to do a tour of the city, for there is no other mode of conveyance, or at least we saw none.

Of course Wills led the attack. Off he went in his easy-chair, a great pipe in his mouth, his face radiant. This city of fetid smells, of filthy humanity, could not check his irrepressible good-humour. He was out for a holiday, and he meant to enjoy himself. It was 'Hi, hi!' and a punch in the back if the pedestrian didn't get out of his way, or a gentle push on the tender loin with his Penang lawyer. Through countless narrow streets we went, where there was only room for one chair to go at a time: dark, squalid streets into which no

ray of sunshine ever came, no breath of pure air : streets literally alive with streams of ugly, dirty Chinamen.

I think we saw all there was to be seen that day, which, when summed up, did not seem much, the spirit growing weary of the unbroken line of ugliness. But Wills expressed himself as satisfied, as having spent a delightful time, though I knew that in reality he was only living for the night to come so that we might set out to explore the notorious flower-boats. When questioned, he strenuously denied the soft suggestion. He was going to see them, of course ; it was what every fellow did—but as for anything else—pooh, he never cared for Chinese women, ugly little brutes ! Yet he seemed most sadly lacking in restraint, and had it not been for our guide he would have had us there at a most unreasonable hour.

But at length the darkness crawled in, and in due time we set out on what proved to be a prolonged and surprising adventure.

I was too unsophisticated to appreciate the peculiar manner in which the gilded youth or the *blasé* old age of Canton enjoys itself ; while even my friend Wills, who dared not utter his

disappointment, showed it in the rough edges of his grim face. In the dark, as I stumbled over narrow bridges, it seemed to me that there were endless streets of these boats, the smooth water of the river being the roadway. Many black looks were cast upon us as we crowded in the doorway of these house-boats to gaze in at the people, anxious to discover something of exceptional interest ; but Wills at length proclaimed the whole business to be a ghastly fraud, and questioned our guide somewhat sharply as to his reason for bringing us to the wretchedest lot of boats in Canton. The man protested. The boats were the best in the place, the ones all the gentlemen came to see ; but he was afraid the people did not take kindly to foreigners. He would have said 'barbarians,' had he dared, for thus uncivilly does the Chinaman speak of the European.

Wills sputtered contemptuously, and looked as though he would like to damage something or somebody ; but at that moment, perceiving a door partly open to admit a portly Chinaman, he sprang forward, and, before those inside could close the door again, he put forth his foot. His shoulder did the rest. In he slipped,

I following at his heels ; for, though I had no wish to force my objectionable presence upon a fastidious people, I had to stand by my companion no matter what came of it.

The portly chow, whom by his red button we at once knew to be a mandarin of the first rank, stood at the bottom of the steps and surveyed us with a look of contemptuous protest ; but Wills, gracefully raising his hat, bade them all a cheery good-evening. To his salutation, however, was returned nothing but angry glances. Pretending not to notice these, he marched to the nearest table, sat down, and then calmly began to fill his pipe. Looking round upon the scowling assembly, he smiled sweetly and cried out to the women, who had ceased strumming their guitars at our entrance : ‘ Go on with the music, my dears. I haven’t got any blasted scruples about melody.’ Of course, no one understood a word of what he said ; but his ugly, clever face was sparkling with good-humour and whisky, and even a Chinaman has eyes.

A curious scene ; an unsafe one too, I felt. Imagine a spacious saloon with a profusion of gaudy gilding and carving ; countless lights twinkling behind many-coloured glasses ; em-

broidered silk hangings shielding little alcoves ; silk scrolls upon the walls with the wise words of the philosophers written in gold (a quaint conceit) : the tinkling of guitars, the chatter of voices, the close, sickly smell of opium mingled with the disagreeable odour of Chinese cooking. This is the scene we so suddenly entered upon—so suddenly, in fact, that our guide was left on the outside of the door.

The men who were reclining on the benches drinking tea or playing cards looked up lazily as we entered : the opium-smokers went on with their smoking. For them there was nothing but dreams, and a vagueness infinite. Here and there young girls with white, ghostly faces and vermilion lips flitted, waiting on the gilded youth, who seemed abnormally fond of sweetmeats ; or strummed the gay guitar. All was brightness, gaiety—and smells.

But as soon as we made our appearance at the heels of the mandarin, and those assembled saw by his looks that we had not come as his guests, an ominous silence followed, a silence most curious and profound. It was as plain as reason could make it that they resented our intrusion. I whispered as much to Wills,

and suggested a dignified retreat ; but I might as well have whispered to the north-east monsoon as it roars down the Formosa Channel. Not alone was he by nature a hard, obstinate fellow, never unwilling to fight, but he had reached a certain degree of recklessness for which state a certain fluid might be made mainly responsible. Under such conditions, I could only wait in fear and trembling, wondering what would come next.

In the meantime the mandarin had waddled to the far end of the saloon, and there, surrounded by the painted women and the *blasé* youth, he began to hold forth in a very excitable manner. Gesticulations were made in our direction, angry looks were flashed at us, and two or three of the more impetuous of the gilded coterie—flunkies to the last—came over to us, and with extremely threatening gestures began wildly to harangue us. Wills looked up benevolently and smiled approvingly, especially upon one little pale-faced fellow who, quite unnecessarily, had succeeded in working himself into a violent passion.

‘You’re quite right,’ said Wills, though he did not understand a syllable of the excited

spluttering : ‘you’re a damned good little chap if you are a chow, and most assuredly deserve a rise in life.’ With that he arose, towering over the little Chinaman, but still smiling serenely, and catching the yellow man by his neck, and where the seat of his pantaloons ought to have been, he lifted him on to the table amid the tea-cups. There was a furious kicking of heels, a real smashing of china, and then the little man stood high and dry on the table. Wills immediately bobbed on his knees and made the kowtow. This was too much for the assembly, whose anger immediately gave way to subdued titterings, and in one or two instances to violent laughter. The Chinaman is really a humorous dog despite his bilious complexion, and you will turn him from his evil thoughts in a moment if you can only make him laugh—and keep him laughing. That is the difficulty ; for he is a sly, treacherous brute who unswervingly pursues his end with a quiet stealthiness and enmity unexampled in other races.

Wills never thought of this, or he might have been more careful. But then, he was never one to think, acting entirely on the im-

pulse of the moment. Looking about him and seeing the smiling faces, he strode over to where the mandarin stood, and brought his great hand down on that dignitary's shoulder with a 'How do, old buck?'

The portly official seemed to turn yellow and white and green and purple all at once, and had it not been for the assistance of those who stood by he would have collapsed entirely. The looks which he and his friends cast upon the redoubtable Wills were such as to make me wish that we had never entered the place; but my companion, oblivious of menacing looks, went among the girls, paying them extravagant compliments and chucking them under the chin—a liberty which I am bound to say they seemed to resent, for apparently even these pariahs lose caste through contact with a white man.

Wills kept calling loudly for tea and beer; but as neither was forthcoming, he somewhat nonchalantly cleared a little table of half a dozen cups of the former beverage, which cups had duly been laid out for some one else. Refreshed thus, he seized one of the native guitars, struck some excruciating notes thereon, and

began to contort his ugly face into a series of most undignified grimaces. Then, lifting up his fog-horn of a voice, he bellowed a famous old sailor chanty, the opening lines of which ran :

‘Sally Brown, I love your daughter,
Heigh, ho, old and gone !
Love her a darned sight better than I ought ’er—
Spend my money on Sally Brown.’

It was a most moving song, and Wills did full justice to the fine sturdy verse and the monotonous chant ; but how it affected his hearers would be difficult to say. The girls looked scared, the men little better ; while each showed plainly that he thought the big barbarian had gone mad. There was a whispered consultation, and furtive glances were cast towards the door. Then a look of intense uncertainty superseded all, for Wills, following up a glimpse of something he had seen behind a curtain on his left, disappeared in one of the alcoves I have already mentioned. A minute or two of suspense followed, during which I noted the visible darkening of the mandarin’s brow, the consternation of the assembly : then there was a sudden rustling of the curtain, followed by the scream of a woman.

The next moment a Chinese girl, evidently adorned for the sacrifice, bounded into our midst with Wills after her.

‘Hold your infernal row, you little ass,’ he was saying in a coaxing, endearing tone of voice. ‘I’m not going to hurt you, silly cat. Chook, chook, chook! One would think the hussy had never seen a man before! Flower-boats are a fraud, Hugh, old chap. Give me respectable England. There, at any rate, girls don’t cry out before they’re hurt.’

The girl, in the meantime, her face white with terror, bounded over to the mandarin’s side, and, resting her pale cheek on his capacious frontage, eyed the terrible Wills with a look of anxious curiosity.

‘So she belongs to the old buck,’ mused that worthy, favouring the official with a meaning look. ‘Sly, fat old devil! I wonder if he’d explode if I hit him?’

‘For heaven’s sake, Wills, mind what you’re doing! The fellow’s a high official.’

‘What if he is? To Satan with him and his high officialism! That’s the only girl I’ve fancied to-night. My dear Hugh, this is decidedly hard.’

He began to look serious : I felt so.

‘Let us get out of this,’ I suggested, being a man of peace. ‘The girl’s a poor specimen anyway.’

‘Humph!’ said he, as he winked at the damsel and playfully called her a little ass. The mandarin, seeing the wink and the amorous look, scowled visibly. Wills, seeing the scowl, advanced still closer to that dignitary and patted him on the stomach.

‘Easy, old buck,’ he said ; and still continuing to stroke the stomach, he added in his best nautical voice, ‘Belay, there ! Avast heaving !’

One needed to be as reckless as Wills to enjoy the joke thoroughly. To me it seemed a joke of a very grim order : one that might land us in an awkward, not to say dangerous, position. Seeing the mandarin step back, his yellow, puffy face growing dark with anger, I once more implored my companion to desist, to come away ; but the anger, the disdain, which wreathed the Chinaman’s countenance but inflamed Wills’s resentment, and without more ado he poked his nose threateningly into the mandarin’s face. That official, not liking the contact, spat ; and as Wills’s ugly face

happened to be in the line of fire, it was made receiver-general. He staggered back like one shot, and I shall never forget the 'Pah!' of disgust that escaped him. Then there was a sudden movement in the crowd: Wills darted forward; there was a crash, and down went the portly official dragging his girl and two tables with him.

A moment or two of wild confusion ensued. There was a hurried righting of chairs and tables, a collecting of broken crockery, a frenzied babble of voices, and then the mandarin, his nose bleeding copiously, was presented to the view. Knowing we were in for it now, I held myself in readiness, for, however much I might have deplored Wills's behaviour, I could do nothing but stand by him in this extremity.

The mandarin, here sitting up, gasped out half a dozen furious words; there was a sudden rush for the door, but I, throwing myself before it, held the men in check.

'Good boy, Hugh,' said Wills, as calmly as a man might say, 'Well hit' at cricket. 'Don't let those beggars pass.'

'I have no wish to spend the night in a Chinese gaol.'

Wills turned away with a chuckle, and, ad-

dressing the prostrate official, said, 'Come, get up, old buck. Fair's fair, you know. You spat and I thumped, and so we'd better cry quits.'

Speaking thus, he advanced as if to help his fallen adversary to his feet. But the movement was evidently misunderstood, and in a flash a dozen ugly knives were bared. Wills sprang back with an oath.

'So that's the game!' he cried. 'Steady, Hugh, old man: these swine are showing their teeth.'

I saw it and called to him to join me, thinking we might open the door quick enough to enable us to make a sudden exit; but, as if understanding my words, three of the men crept round towards me and placed themselves between me and him. He saw the movement and smiled, but the smile was anything but a prepossessing one.

The situation had now reached a critical stage. Fortified by the portly presence of the law, as represented in the mandarin, the bullies, sycophants, parasites, or whatever they were, showed a most threatening front, and I began to experience sundry curious qualms. Under existing circumstances we might be murdered

with impunity. Who would dare speak when the law itself was dumb? I saw the cruel blades, the sullen, ugly faces, and felt none too sure of the end of this night's work.

Presently Wills spoke to me, his voice as calm and indifferent as of old. Indeed, I had never heard it sound so free, so utterly devoid, of all trace of anxiety. He spoke without turning his head, his eyes riveted on the faces of those before him. By what he said I knew that he had at last begun seriously to consider the situation.

‘I say, Hughie, old man, what armament have you?’

‘A pair of fists.’

‘And quite enough for any dozen chows. Do you think you can manage the door all right?’

‘I think not.’

‘There’s no hurry, you know.’

‘Impossible. They’re only waiting a chance to strike.’

‘Humph,’ he muttered, ‘how damned annoying!’

There was an ominous pause for a moment or two, and then, in reply to an exclamation of

the mandarin's, our assailants began a stealthy advance. By inches they moved—slowly, steadily, and yet with a deadly precision; hate gleaming in their ugly eyes, their lips pallid with excitement. I looked at Wills and saw a grim smile stealing down the corners of his iron mouth. Then, when I thought our assailants were about to rush us, he stooped suddenly, and the next moment he was brandishing one of the heavy tables above his head. Back fell the Chinamen, their faces showing their fear of this gigantic barbarian. There was no mistaking the look in Wills's eyes. Advancing meant the scattering of somebody's brains. Chattering with terror, the yellow men crowded round the mandarin, who, however, never took his hateful eyes from Wills's face. The latter addressed me without turning his head.

‘Hughie, old man, come here.’

Profiting by his example, I whirled my stick above my head and bounded to his side.

‘These swine mean mischief,’ he said, still speaking without looking at me. ‘I can see it in that fat devil's face. Just pop into that recess behind and have a look see.’

‘But you——’

‘I’m all right. Go, like a good fellow.’

There was no disputing with him when he took that tone, so, pulling back the curtain, I slipped into the alcove. It was the same that Wills had entered, the one in which he had surprised the girl who had been the first cause of our present predicament. It was a very small compartment, about the size of an ordinary ship’s cabin. On one side was a low bunk, the clothes of which, scattered here and there, showed excessive haste or great untidiness. At the further end was a small spiral stair which evidently led to the deck. These things, by the aid of a small lamp which swung above the bunk, I quickly noted, the stair in particular causing a thrill of exultation to sweep through me. I noted, too, that there was a sliding door to the cabin. The situation was not yet hopeless.

Though this examination takes some time to describe, it was accomplished with inconceivable rapidity, and I stealthily peeped out preparatory to entering the saloon once more. As I looked I saw that Wills had retreated some paces, and that the yellow men were dangerously near him. Indeed, he was holding

the table before him now and using it as a shield. Even as I watched I saw one fellow make a slash at him, and heard the blade ring on the hard wood.

‘It’s all right, Wills,’ I said, infusing a confidence into my voice which I was far from feeling. ‘Back gradually towards me, and when I give the word slip in as quickly as you can.’

‘Right you are, Hughie, old man,’ came the cheery response. ‘Ah, would you, you ——!’ and ring, ring came the steel on the iron legs of the table. But even as he spoke, even as he threatened, he did not forget to retreat; and the yellow men, grasping his intention, set up a furious howling and made a desperate rush at him, but like lightning the table circled through the air and went flying into the foremost group with a terrible crash. There was a sickening thud, a babel of shrieks and execrations, and, taking advantage of the momentary confusion, Wills darted in beside me, while I, with equal quickness, slammed-to the sliding door. And none too soon either. The next moment half a dozen knife-points were sticking through the thin panel.

‘Humph!’ grunted Wills, ‘where are we now, Hughie, old man?’

‘In a devil of a hole,’ I growled.

‘In that case, my son, we’d better get out of it as quickly as we can.’ And, even as he spoke, he darted up the spiral stair that led to the deck.

In the meantime the jabbering went on without, the blows upon the frail door increasing in vehemence. Two of the panels were already broken, and through the jagged apertures I could see the hideous black eyes glaring savagely upon me, could note the contortions of the ugly, pallid mouths. The door could not possibly hold for many seconds longer, and then——

I was startled by a crash overhead, and instantly guessed that my worst fears were realised. Our assailants had mounted the deck and had thus cut off our only means of retreat! But where was Wills, Wills the redoubtable? I turned inquiringly to the stair, and lo, there were his big feet descending! These were soon followed by the rest of him. His face was flushed, and he seemed to breathe rather stertorously. He threw a quick glance at the shattered door, and then turned to me.

‘Up with you, Hughie, old man,’ he cried. ‘They’d locked the blasted hatch, but the way’s clear now.’

‘After you,’ I said.

‘Don’t be a damned fool, Hughie.’

The horrid faces were peering in upon us: the frail door shook ominously beneath the blows. Without more ado I mounted the stairs, and as I did so I beheld Wills reach up, unhook the lamp, and then dash it through the aperture into the face of the enemy. A still more furious howl was raised, a howl of blinding pain, and with a crash the door fell in.

Emerging into the cool night air on the deck of the boat, I saw the cause of the crash which I had mistaken for the arrival of our enemies in the rear. Over the staircase, or companion-way, was a sort of hooded hatch, and this Wills had to break away to give us egress. When I saw the way the planks were forced, ripped, and torn as by an explosion, I ceased to wonder at the redness of his face.

But little time was given me for reflection, for scarcely had I sprung out upon the deck than Wills was beside me. Seizing the broken

hatch he, quick as thought, jammed it into the companion-way, and for a breathing space pursuit was checked. There was a spluttering and a howling below, but no immediate danger.

‘Which way now?’ I queried.

Wills took a quick, comprehensive glance about him, but the darkness baffled him as it had me. Before he could speak, however, a voice shouted out from the darkness, ‘To the light, mass’r, to the light.’

‘The guide!’ ejaculated Wills, recognising the voice on the instant. ‘But where the deuce does the right lead?’

‘Let us find out.’

‘Wise as ever, friend Hughie.’

We were about to descend, when the main door of the boat opened and out into the light streamed several of our assailants, the mandarin at their head; the other half was still sweating and cursing in the spiral way.

‘There’s nothing for it but the roofs,’ said Wills. ‘Follow me.’

Luckily the boats almost touched, so that we had no difficulty in leaping from one to the other; the only misfortune was that Wills leapt on to the skylight, and that I, following

so close upon his heels, deepened the catastrophe. There was a horrid noise of breaking glass, a series of blood-curdling shrieks from the people beneath, who must have thought that the heavens had suddenly overwhelmed them in their iniquity. I know I had considerable difficulty in preventing myself from falling through, and Wills's cursing assured me that his long legs were hanging about him like a reproach.

However, after much squeezing and cutting of fingers, we managed to draw ourselves clear, and, looking round, I saw that our original assailants had succeeded in forcing the passage of the companion-way, and were now preparing to renew the pursuit; added to which this new accident had brought another hornet's nest about our ears.

'Onward, old man,' said Wills, 'and be more careful.'

'Then perhaps I had better go first?' I suggested.

A short laugh was all the answer he gave.

So away along the tops of the boats I went with Wills at my heels, and a howling horde of savages not many yards in the rear. It was a

breakneck journey, and we took it at a breakneck pace: a scramble here, a slip and a fall there, then up and away again, with an almost blind trust in Providence; while behind us the crowd increased in numbers, and the savage cries of 'The barbarians, the barbarians—kill them, kill them!' rose thick upon the air.

Just then Wills began to pant and stumble, the reason of which I was to know later. Excellent fighter as I knew him to be, he was but a poor man at running away. Seizing him just in time to prevent him falling between two boats, I hurriedly asked him what was the matter.

'I'm about done for,' he gasped. 'You go on and leave me.'

That was likely.

'Try,' I said. 'Better anything than to fall into the hands of these devils.'

As I spoke I helped him on to the next boat. Here, however, I found to my extreme consternation that the boats came to an end. Looking over the side, I saw the river flowing darkly. Behind, the cries of our pursuers resounded with tenfold vehemence. They evidently knew how the chase would end.

‘Humph!’ said Wills, in the old careless way, ‘a corner, Hugh, old man. It’s not a tea-party, my son; but we must make——What’s that?’

Looking out across the water, I saw a boat rapidly approaching.

‘A sampan, that’s all.’

‘Then once more follow me.’

Limping to his feet he dragged himself to the edge of the boat, took a look ahead, then another one behind, and the next moment he was splashing in the water.

‘It’s all right,’ he yelled. ‘Make for the sampan.’

There was not a moment to lose. Already the pursuers were close upon me. I could see their black forms flitting hither and thither; could almost fancy I saw the hateful glitter of their eyes. Whatever lay before, there was infinite danger behind. As the foremost ruffian set his foot upon the boat, I sprang.

When I came to the surface I heard our pursuers’ baffled cry of rage ring out harshly on the night, and I felt grateful for the intervening stretch of water. When I reached the sampan I found Wills already aboard. A splash, a

scramble, and I was by his side, and, seizing an oar apiece, we soon shot out across the dark water.

How we made the old woman and her two boys understand that we wanted the Hong-Kong boat I never could tell. Perhaps they guessed as much. At any rate, in a very few minutes they brought us alongside, and once aboard I learnt that Wills, during his ascent of the spiral staircase, had been severely stabbed in the leg, which accounted for his inability to keep up with me.

No, I have not heard of him for a long time, but I don't think he has yet been made an admiral of the fleet.

WHY MRS. WETHERTON WENT HOME

CAPTAIN WETHERTON was A.D.C. to the general commanding the forces at Hong-Kong, and was personally convinced that he was an individual of considerable importance. Indeed, he carried himself as though the whole honour and glory of the British Army lay upon his insignificant shoulders ; nor, if one might judge by appearances, did he find the burden an exceedingly heavy one. Though small in stature, he atoned for this physical failing by an exceedingly colossal carriage. To see him swing along the road in his tight coat and tighter trousers was a truly awe-inspiring sight. The coolies kow-towed to him with apprehensive humility ; flew from his path, not daring to use the same footway with him, and made their obeisance from the road. It is true he did occasionally acknowledge the

salutation, remembering that greater people had frequently to appear civil; but it was a bit of a nuisance all the same—the penalty one pays for greatness. It might be doubted that greatness was worth it all.

Personally, Wetherton was a little dark-haired man, with a dark face, a pair of piercing eyes, a nose with a thick end and no bridge to speak of, and a prodigious black moustache. A formidable little man, to be sure, who, when seated upon a horse, presented a front like that of Mars. People used to say that he ought never to be seen except on horseback. Mounted upon his prancing steed, he was the perfect picture of a furious fire-eater; on foot he was quite an insignificant little being, whom you would think twice before you kicked, for fear of hurting him. Yet he had a devil of a reputation, and had seen some fighting in the hills in India. No stricter disciplinarian drew breath, and while the men thought him a coxcomb they knew he was not to be trifled with; and when they remembered that he had smelt real powder—a long way off, perhaps—they frequently forgave him his idiosyncrasies.

And yet, when you came to ponder over it,

it was astonishing how much of the heroic that little body held. There was infinite resolution in the cut of his mouth, determination in his keen eye, while his snub nose completed the dogged, pugnacious look of the whole face. A pocket-martinet, that's what he was ; a determined fighter every inch of him. One may be a giant without a giant's bulk ; and Wellington and Wetherton both began with the same letter and ended with the same syllable.

Whenever he put in an appearance at the club, we invariably extracted a little quiet amusement from him, for his conversation, if at times somewhat patronising, was almost entertaining. There was a certain self-consciousness about the little man which lent a delightful flavour to his remarks ; and while listening to him, you felt convinced that here was the man who could set the world in order, here was the man who should be ruling at the Horse Guards and not resting in a God-forsaken hole like China. But what would you ? He could not expect the world to abandon its crooked ways for his especial benefit. Habit had become a second nature, and second natures come to stay. Wetherton, despite his martial yearnings,

was philosopher enough to see and understand : but I will not go so far as to say that he never chafed at the bit. We all admitted that he would most probably do something if he ever got the chance, for he possessed in abundance those qualities which, on paper, make a great soldier. Moreover, he possessed that best of all qualities—a profound belief in himself ; and the man who believes in himself can always get other men to believe in him.

Then one day the rumour spread that his wife was coming out to join him, and this lent him a still greater importance. The news sent our sluggish blood beating a throb or two quicker, for we had all seen her portrait—he had half a dozen of them in all shapes and sizes in his diggings—and she had duly passed our critical scrutiny. Of course we envied him more than ever. Brilliant prospects, an unbounded belief in himself, and a fresh young wife longing to throw herself into his arms. In England a man does not fully appreciate the manifold charms which surround him ; but let him live long among the yellow or black people, and he will go mad at the thought of a bit of cool, white skin.

We were filled with a thousand wild conjectures. He had led us to believe that she was considered a great beauty in her native town—a renowned south-coast watering-place—and we began to wonder if she had any of the dash and ‘go’ of that famous resort. If so, some of us boys might expect a lively time, and Wether-ton would have other than his military duties to look after.

As for him, the near approach of his wife brightened him up wonderfully. We had long known that the little man was inordinately proud of her, but we had no idea he was such a devoted husband. His face flushed and his eyes sparkled as he spoke of her, and we could see that, however much he was bound up in himself, he was none the less bound up in her. It was ‘I must drop that sort of thing when my wife comes.’ ‘My wife always objected to this,’ or ‘My wife always objected to that.’ ‘I rather fancy she’s a bit prudish, don’t you know, and the life you chaps live here’ll give her a devil of a shock.’ It was ‘my wife this and my wife that,’ till we began to wonder what monster of propriety was about to descend in our midst. And yet it was quite

pleasant to see little Wetherton cock-a-hoop—not that such a state was unusual with him, but his cock-a-hooping now was of the magnificent and enviable order. His martial face relaxed its grimness as he spoke of her, and even his fierce moustache took to itself a soft curve of love. That he was superlatively happy in the prospect of being united to her was indubitable; and little wonder, if, as he said, she could give points to any woman in the colony.

He had been with us now for more than a year, and, though we knew he was married, we had little hopes of seeing his wife; for the woman who can stay away from her husband for so long a period is either very indifferent to his personal attributes, or physically incapable of undertaking the long journey. The latter, it seems, was the cause in this instance and so accustomed had we grown to the thought that Mrs. Wetherton was a hopeless invalid, that the information that at last she was coming out struck us as a sort of impossible rumour.

But, impossible as we deemed it, it was nevertheless true, though the *Yang-tse*—the

ship she was on—seemed a long time coming. Indeed, the first excitement was already dying out when we heard that the vessel had arrived at Singapore. This wakened us up a little; but being a slow craft, and having to face a strong north-east monsoon, another week elapsed before the *Yang-tse* steamed into the harbour of Hong-Kong.

That night, after dinner, I looked Wetherton up, curiosity playing the deuce with my discretion. I found him on the verandah pulling thoughtfully at his moustache and watching the smoke from his cigar pass into the mystical shadows above. A young fellow was with him whom I never remembered to have seen before. As I approached, this individual very politely rose, though Wetherton merely waved his hand by way of greeting

‘Welcome, my dear fellow,’ he cried cheerily, or with a heroic effort at cheeriness. ‘Glad you came round. Sit down and have a smoke. Boy, another tumbler—quick! By the way, let me introduce you to Doctor Vine—the doctor of the *Yang-tse*,’ he added, by way of explanation.

Doctor Vine, a tall, dark young man with

a long, loose figure and an uncertain smile, favoured me by dropping a long, limp hand into mine and telling me that he was extremely pleased to make my acquaintance, for which I expressed myself as duly grateful, slipping meanwhile into an easy-chair beside Wether-ton.

‘So the *Yang-tse* is in at last?’ I said, as Wether-ton took the tumbler from the boy and mixed me a whisky-and-soda.

‘Yes,’ he answered, but doubtfully.

‘And Mrs. Wether-ton has profited by the voyage?’

‘Exceedingly, I should say. I have never seen her look better.’

I turned inquiringly to the doctor.

‘Oh, we had a capital passage,’ he explained. ‘No bad weather worth speaking of till we left Singapore. I think Mrs. Wether-ton is an excellent sailor.’

‘She certainly looks remarkably well,’ said her husband enthusiastically.

‘One of the advantages of making friends with the doctor,’ I suggested.

Wether-ton looked meaningly at me, and, immediately conscious of having made a false

step, I grew confused. His shifty, piercing eyes met mine. I saw his heavy brows contract, a rigid look steal down his face. Then he fumbled his cigar into his mouth and began to smoke violently. The doctor quietly sipped his whisky-and-soda and lit a fresh cigarette. I at once led the conversation into another channel, and we were discussing the benefits to be derived from the rainy season in Hong-Kong when Mrs. Wetherton burst upon the scene.

With reluctance I admit that the first view of her did not fulfil expectations. Wetherton had led us to believe that she was in every essential a model of her sex, whereas her figure was very slight, not to say thin, her hips and chest apparently undeveloped, her face absolutely colourless. At least, so it appeared to me in the uncertain light. Fine teeth she had, to be sure, and fine eyes, if somewhat heavy. Indeed, such heavy eyes seemed to be fixed wrongly in such a little face. But they were expressive, ye gods! And the light stealing through the loose masses of her pale brown hair lit it with gleams of fire. As she stood there in her

white dinner-dress I compared her with sprites innumerable, but never once with a woman of flesh and blood.

The hand she gave to me at parting was firm, if dry and cold, and this latter quality seemed to strengthen the strange opinion I had formed of her. Somehow I did not envy Wetherton the possession of his icicle, though there was some consolation in knowing that no icicle could stand the climate of Hong-Kong.

As I was going to walk back to the club, I asked the doctor if his course lay in a similar direction. He started nervously, looked at his watch, and said he feared it was getting rather late. Wetherton continued his strenuous puffing, but his wife exclaimed that it was ridiculously early, and begged I would not think of rushing away so soon. She wanted me to tell her more about the place, the people; what was the thing and what was not the thing, and answer a thousand other inconsequent queries. Of course I declared I was hers to command, but that she really must excuse me to-night, as I had a very important engagement. She pouted prettily,

said she believed all the people in Hong-Kong were horrid, and then very graciously allowed me to depart.

The next morning I met her in the Queen's Road, and stood chatting with her for a minute or two before Lane-Crawford's. The doctor of the *Yang-tse* was her escort, and in the broad daylight he looked more like a second-rate clerk than ever. Nor did the daylight render her more fascinating. The mystic charm of the evening had flown, and a little pale-faced woman with drab hair stood before me. I went away feeling that Wetherton had been hugging a delusion to his soul, for which that arrant fraud, Distance, was mainly responsible. Who has not gloated over the irregular features of his dear till they become perfect in their classic cut? Her undeveloped figure takes to itself a delightful contour: even her empty talk has a resounding fulness as of the sea.

I saw her again that night at a bazaar at the Town Hall. Wetherton was with her this time—that is, he was as near as he could get. The doctor's long figure had blotted him out, and a curious slouch the medico

looked in his long tails and black tie. He had evidently been dining with the Wether-ton.

And thus it was all the time the *Yang-tse* was in port. Wherever you saw Mrs. Wether-ton you had not far to look to catch a glimpse of the doctor, who seemed to follow her about like a great stupid dog.

Of course the fellows began to talk. First it was an extremely knowing look, then a smile, then an expression of good-will towards Wether-ton. I like such expressions of good-will. They are so consoling. But people will talk in these small places, the curse of such places being that you cannot do a thing without your neighbours knowing it. Wether-ton, however, being perfectly oblivious of their good-will, went unconcernedly on his way, and, if he had any qualms, he managed most skilfully to conceal them. His black moustachios still retained their formidable bristle; in fact, it might almost be said they bristled more than ever. To all outward appearance Mars himself had set the seal upon that face. And yet I thought that the eyes were not as steady as of yore.

I met him again some three days after the *Yang-tse* had sailed for Shanghai, and speedily learnt that the doctor had gone with her.

‘Shanghai!’ I echoed quite innocently, for at times the best of us are nothing better than sucking doves. ‘I thought she had gone home.’

And then, before he knew what he was doing, he blurted out, ‘I wish to God she had.’

He saw the surprise in my face, and flushed darkly. Then taking out his handkerchief and mopping his forehead, he bitterly complained of the excessive heat for that time of the year. Poor little chap!

Some two weeks later I met Mrs. Wetherton in her chair, and, behold! there was the long doctor walking by her side! So the *Yang-tse* had returned from the north! I passed on with a bow and the stereotyped smile, but I was not without the belief that there might be serious developments at any moment. The doctor, though stupid, had the tenacity of the mule; the woman, though frail of body, was not without some force of character. She would be very thin one day, angular and ugly, but she would nevertheless issue the word of

command. Woe betide the underling who disobeyed those clean-cut lips!

I only called once after the *Yang-tse* had returned, but the reception I met with was one not calculated to appease my personal vanity. The doctor was there, Wetherton was there; and while the former seemed exceptionally stupid, the latter appeared like a man who knows not whether to charge or to retreat. Mrs. Wetherton was polite, if distant, but as unsociable as a woman with a headache. Indeed, she only seemed capable of the least utterance after inhaling the inspiration from her smelling-bottle.

Wetherton saw me to the gate, and at my expression of the fear that his wife was not looking well he launched out into a fierce diatribe against the island. It was not fit for white men to live in, much less delicate white women, and he was a fool ever to have allowed his wife to come out. She couldn't breathe, simply couldn't breathe, in the heavy atmosphere, and—here he shook his head gravely—he had no wish to leave her at Happy Valley, pretty as that resting-place was. Though I didn't think such a contingency was possible,

I hypocritically told him to cheer up and hope for the best. The climate always affected new comers more or less, but it was marvellous how soon they grew accustomed to it. I knew it would rapidly improve once the *Yang-tse* left the harbour.

If I remember rightly, the ship stayed about a week in port on her homeward voyage ; and though I saw neither Mrs. Wetherton nor the doctor during that period, I heard that he was still as attentive as ever, and that Wetherton was rapidly developing into the worst-tempered man in Hong-Kong. The woman, I could believe, was cool enough. I could imagine her thin, curling lips, her white, placid face, her heavy eyes aglow with determination. Wetherton would find it much easier to rule five thousand able-bodied privates than one such delicate woman.

The night before he sailed, the doctor dined with the Wethertons at the Hong-Kong Hotel, and I afterwards saw them at the theatre, apparently enjoying the rather stale humours of a local Christy-minstrel show ; but as to what happened after there is considerable doubt. One says one thing, another tells you

a totally different story, and between conflicting rumours a pretty set of exaggerations was circulated. But it is a fact, and one to which the policeman on the landing-stage will bear witness, that between half-past five and six on the morning that the *Yang-tse* put to sea, Captain Wetherton, his face livid with excitement, his attire in a shocking state of disorder, arrived and made some breathless inquiries concerning that particular ship.

‘Sampan!’ he shouted wildly, ‘sampan!’ and when the boat came alongside, he stepped aboard, and, waving his hand out across the bay, cried, ‘The *Yang-tse*, quick, quick—the *Yang-tse*!’ The sampan man looked up with open mouth and a smile peculiarly Chinese.

‘*Yang-tse* ’ave all-ee same gone, Cap’n.’

Wetherton looked round like a man in a dream, and clutched the roof of the sampan for support.

‘Is that so, constable?’

‘Indeed, sir, yes. The *Yang-tse* sailed at daybreak.’

Wetherton groped his way out of the boat, and staggered across the road like a drunken man.

When I met him a week after, I thought he had aged a good ten years. His head was not carried as proudly as of yore: even his tight trousers had lost their spruce, aggressive look.

‘They tell me Mrs. Wetherton has gone home in the *Yang-tse*?’ I inquired.

‘Yes,’ he said, with a bold attempt at easy familiarity; ‘I was always afraid this damned climate would never suit her.’

THE PHANTOM JUNK

OF course everybody laughed at the idea: everybody naturally would. Let a thing be ever so little beyond the comprehension of the ordinary mortal, and he is sure to jeer at it. The thing is right or wrong according to the way it appeals to him, or as fashion dictates. This thing appealed to his scepticism, and he laughed. He laughed rudely at the simple tale of the sampan men, who swore by the holy ashes of their ancestors that they had seen *it*; he smiled superciliously at the earnest narratives of the white sailors, who, while returning to their ships, had also seen *it*. Everybody knows the state a white sailor is in after he has spent a few hours ashore. Really, if better evidence were not forthcoming, it would be as well to dismiss the subject at once and for ever.

And yet the *thing* had been seen. Those who had thought it worth their while to inves-

tigate the matter were convinced that it was no lying talk of the Chinaman, no drunken fancy of the white sailor. After all, those most intimately acquainted with sailors knew quite well that even among that benighted fraternity there were men who could go ashore and enjoy themselves rationally; while even the sailor drunk ashore is a different being from the sailor drunk aboard. Stupid he may be, but he knows his way about a ship, and can tell you which way the wind's blowing. It was all hearsay, of course. No commission of inquiry had sat upon the matter: there was no unassailable evidence. It was merely a rumour which you might credit or discredit as you thought fit.

The rumour was this, and it arose among the sampan people who sleep on the boats, and who know everything that goes on in the harbour. They said that on more than one occasion a phantom junk had been seen to steal through the Ly-ee-moon Pass, sail steadily down the Kowloon side, and disappear southwards through the Sulphur Channel. But, as usual, the evidence was contradictory. Some said the phantom scudded along at a

terrific rate, leaving on the mind an impression of a junk in full sail ; others said that the sails only were luminous, while others again declared that the sails were luminous only at intervals. Out of such a web of contradiction who could be expected to find the right thread ? A Chinese puzzle, indeed, over which the supercilious sneered, the unbeliever scoffed, and the plodding star-gazer wondered.

For a long time no one but the sampan people had any cognisance of the fact, if fact it were ; and even many of them were known to be incredulous : for, though absurdly childish in many things, your Chinaman, being a natural liar, is a true sceptic. Yet so many had seen the phantom, or had sworn they had, that to disbelieve altogether in its existence was next to impossible. So the story gathered and grew strong among them ; but being a people apart, it was a long time before the rumour reached the ears of the white population. And then, as we have seen, it only came to be laughed at.

The officials, naturally, were the last persons to hear of it ; and when they did, the official lip curled like the tongue of an ant-eater, and for

several months the Phantom Junk was tabooed. No man likes to be thought an idiot, and to mention that spectral craft, except by way of ridicule, was to lay yourself open to considerable misapprehension. But one night, or, rather, early one morning, while the commander of H.M.S. *Awful* was being conveyed to his ship, he saw, or thought he saw, the spectral junk in the offing on the Kowloon side of the Pass. Of course, it was early in the morning, when the light is uncertain, and he had been at a merry meeting in a 'piecee house allee same belong top-side'; but at the same time the word of one of her Majesty's officers is a sacred thing. No one could possibly accuse such a hero of being drunk; no one would think of hinting that he could possibly see double. Of course the smile was as supercilious as ever, but the commander of the *Awful* was a man to be taken seriously.

It was marvellous how he stuck to his story. They might argue and laugh and jeer till they were sick, but he knew perfectly well that he had seen something for which he could not satisfactorily account, and that something was the gleaming white sails of a junk. For a

moment only they shone out, and, ere he could call the attention of his sampan coolies to the curious phenomenon, the thing had disappeared. He made the men lay on their oars and for a full quarter of an hour stand staring out in the darkness; but nothing coming of the scrutiny, he went aboard.

Now, when the Government officials heard that one of her Majesty's officers had actually seen this reprehensible phantom, they immediately began to move in the matter, and, after due deliberation, the police launch was ordered out to intercept the midnight voyager; but though, every night for a week, it hung around the entrance of the Ly-ee-moon Pass, nor left its post till the phantom-scaring day broke, it never caught sight nor sign of the spectre.

The officials naturally felt that they had been hoaxed. Of course they knew all along that there was no ghost, but they thought they might lay their hands on the rascals who had been scaring the lives out of the harbour-folk. As for the commander of the *Awful*—well, the less said about the state that gentleman was in the better. Responsible men who go about seeing phantom junks ought to be locked up.

But that worthy sea-dog was not to be laughed down. He stuck gallantly to his story in spite of sneers and jeers. They might say what they liked, but he would take his dying oath that he was perfectly sober on that memorable night, and that, being sober, and in full possession of what little reason God had given him (here he meant to be sarcastic), he had most certainly seen the luminous sails of a junk start, as it were, out of blackness, and almost as suddenly disappear again; and they could take it or leave it, but it was the truth, nevertheless.

All this was put down to that magnificent obstinacy of the Briton, who never admits defeat, no matter how severe the drubbing: a consoling sort of idiosyncrasy, if at times a trifle absurd. But there happened to be one man among the officials who possessed a little more imagination than his hidebound brothers, and, in the face of official feeling, he let it be known that he believed implicitly in the statement of the commander of the *Awful*. He had not pursued the usual high official course and let his subordinates bring him a string of nonsensical tales to be swallowed without a

knowledge of their composition ; but he had gone among the sampan men, carefully sifted their evidence, and eventually came to the conclusion that, phantom or no phantom, the tale told by the more intelligent of the watermen agreed in every particular with that of the commander of the *Awful*. A dozen different stories he heard, all told in a dozen different ways ; but the one which seemed most prevalent, and which boasted of the greatest number of adherents, was the one that told only of the luminous sails.

Now, when my friend came to me with his theory well developed, protesting against the supineness and meanness of the Government, who would not allow him to use the official launch, I immediately offered him the loan of mine, an offer at which he instantly jumped.

‘My dear fellow,’ he cried joyfully, ‘it’s just what I wanted, only I didn’t like to ask. Give me a week, just one little week ; and if by then I haven’t solved this mystery, I will admit to being baffled.’

Though somewhat sceptical myself, his enthusiasm gradually crept into my blood ; and when, later on, I offered to accompany him in

his search for the Phantom Junk, he received the offer with every token of pleasure.

‘And when shall it be?’ I asked.

‘We will start at eleven o’clock to-night.’

‘Good. I will be ready.’

‘And, by the way,’ he said, coming back and looking me meaningly in the eyes, ‘you had better bring your revolver with you, for, unless I am much mistaken, we shall find these phantoms very human.’

A few minutes after eleven that night we slipped our moorings and stole quietly out towards the Pass, extinguishing our lights as soon as we had cleared the men-of-war. But though we cruised about in the darkness for a good four hours, we never caught the slightest glimpse of the Phantom Junk. The next night misfortune still attended us; and a like disappointment awaited us on our third essay. My friend Kernot began to look anxious, and I began to laugh. Our spectre, though certainly a most perverse creature, would no doubt oblige us before the week ran out. Kernot did not take my pleasantries too good-naturedly. With him it was no laughing matter. He had almost pledged his professional reputation on

the authenticity of the story, and that reputation was a considerable thing to him. So, though I could not refrain from having an occasional dig at the Phantom Junk, I tried to recollect what it meant to my friend, and curbed my allusions accordingly.

The sky was overcast and the rain threatened as we set out on our fourth attempt. Away across the water came the wind in savage gusts, a mournful howl seeming to tear itself out of the very bosom of the night. My flesh responded with an uncanny sort of shiver, and involuntarily I buttoned my pilot coat up round my throat. Our usual precautions were observed towards the war-ships, and not till we had them dead astern did we extinguish our lights. Then Kernot and I took up our positions well forward, the engines went slow, and the little launch crept out towards the sea.

We hugged the northern side of the Pass, thinking that in Kowloon way we might the more readily happen on the stranger; but, as usual, without success. The wind also began to blow more steadily, and when we turned for the open sea we met its full force. In an

incredibly short space of time the sea rose, and as we shot along the mouth of the Pass we had a most unpleasant experience. Then began a slow roll back, for we had only to keep her straight; the tide which came swirling in did the rest.

As I now began to feel a bit nipped by the cold, I suggested a drop of grog. Pipes were strictly forbidden, and, like true heroes, we duly martyred ourselves; but grog was not. To my suggestion Kernot replied, 'Ay, ay, sir,' like the tar that he was, and I immediately dived below for some whisky. As I crept back, I made out his figure in the same position, but so absorbed seemed he in his look-out that he did not perceive my approach.

'Kernot, old man,' I said, 'grog!'

'H'sch!'

'What's the matter? Can you see anything?'

He did not reply for a moment. Then, taking the flask without looking, he said, 'I thought I saw something on the other side.'

'What was it like?'

'A white shadow passing over the sea.'

'Kernot, my dear fellow, you're dreaming.'

Here, take a pull. You've got this beastly spectre on the brain.'

'Perhaps not quite so bad, old chap,' he laughed, 'though I admit its influence. Yet it was most singular,' he added, as if speaking to himself.

'The flash-light of some man-of-war,' I suggested. 'You can see the reflection a deuce of a way off.'

'Yes, I know ; but this was not a bit like a flash-light. It was as though a lump of light was sailing——Ah, look——there——there !' I felt his hand tremble as he nervously clutched my arm.

Away on the other side of the channel, deep, it seemed, in Kowloon Bay, a curious misty light showed up. In a moment our glasses were on it, and we both uttered the same exclamation in the same breath :

'The Phantom Junk !'

Yes, there it was, with its phantom sails standing out boldly to the eye, just as the commander of the *Awful* had said. No other part of the ship could be seen, but we took it for granted that there was a phantom hull somewhere. For a clear space of five or six

seconds the spectre showed up weirdly in the gloom, and then disappeared; swallowed up, apparently, by the sea or the black night that gave it birth.

The three men we had brought with us were fortunately fast asleep, but our steersman, who had seen the spectre, set up a horrible muttering and moaning which proclaimed the extent of his terror. Indeed, he even raised some feeble protest when he was given the order to port, which brought Kernot to his side with a bound. There was a momentary scuffle, and then the chow fell in a heap on the deck, where he lay moaning incoherently. With a quick movement of the wheel, Kernot brought the launch round, and, shouting to the engineer to go like hell, we dashed across the channel to the bay.

Making all due allowance for the pride of ownership, there wasn't a launch in Hong-Kong could beat mine for speed, and in a very few minutes I heard Kernot give the order to go slow.

'Do you see anything, Tom?' he shouted, for I was still keeping a sharp look-out well forward.

‘No.’

‘Can you make out the land?’

‘No.’

‘Damnation!’

‘Port a bit. I think I hear breakers.’

‘We can’t be as near as that.’

‘Hist! What’s that to the leeward?’

I knew by the movement of the boat that he had starboarded again. Indeed, in swinging round, we just escaped crashing into a sampan. For a moment only I saw it, and then it disappeared in the darkness.

‘The dinghy of our spectre,’ said Kernot. ‘We must not lose him.’

I was not so sure that Kernot was right, though I deemed it highly probable. At all events, if we could speak with the sampan, it might be to our advantage.

Kernot, who knew every inch of the water thereabouts, here gave the order full speed ahead, and in a moment we were flinging the waves to right and left of us in great style; but though we circled round and round, and in so doing lost some most valuable time, we saw no more of the spectre’s dinghy.

‘She has given us the slip,’ said my com-

panion ruefully. 'Now we must go in pursuit of the junk.' And without more ado he put the launch about, and back towards the town we tore at top speed.

'But, my dear Kernot,' I protested, as I joined him, 'if we can't lay our hands on the dinghy, how the deuce do you expect to collar the junk?'

'Of course,' he replied, 'this junk is no more a phantom than we are. It's a trick—a clever one, I admit, but still a trick. The reason? Well, there may be several reasons. I know of one very good one. We shall see if I am right. I only hope we manage to get through the harbour without observation. By the way, what's the time?'

'Ten past one.'

'A very safe hour. You know how the story goes? The Phantom Junk enters the harbour at the Ly-ee-moon Pass, creeps along the Kowloon side, and makes her exit through the Sulphur Channel. Well, we must reach the Channel before her.'

'She's got a good start.'

'True, but inside she'll have to hug the shore, and then she will lose the wind. I think we have a chance.'

The harbour was dotted with the riding-lights of ships, which, acting as beacons, allowed us to pursue our way in safety; and pretty soon we found ourselves steaming down mid-channel within measurable distance of our goal. Then, bit by bit, as the shipping in shore grew less, we approached the land; and under the shadow of it we steamed slowly forward.

Arriving just off Green Island, we stopped, and with our glasses searched the shadows opposite, but there was no sign of junk or any living thing. Then the mind, not being sure of itself, began to ask itself strange questions, and to receive strange responses from the sea. What were we doing out on this absurd adventure? Had we really seen the Phantom Junk, or had our imagination been playing tricks with us? To all of which the wind gave answer with a hollow, mocking laugh, while the spray flung itself derisively in our faces.

I know I began to feel a bit weary of the business, and was about to suggest that the Phantom Junk had most unconscionably given us the slip, when, without speaking, Kernot drew my attention to the island. At first I

saw nothing, but presently a darker shadow crept out from the shadow of the land and pointed down the Channel. My companion put the wheel over, and like a snake we began to glide after the shadow, which, when it encountered the full force of the wind in mid-channel, made such a good running that we had to go at full speed to gain on it. But gain we certainly did, and with the aid of our glasses we presently saw that our shadow was a junk in full sail. Not a gleam of light could be seen on her. Like ourselves she was setting at defiance the port regulations.

‘There’s your ghost,’ said Kernot mockingly, and yet with more excitement in his voice than he would care to admit. ‘You’ll see she’ll turn round here by the Aberdeen Dock and signal to the people ashore.’

‘Perhaps you’re right,’ I answered, ‘but you’re only going on supposition.’

‘Anyway, Tom, send your steersman here, and, like a good fellow, go and rouse up those other three chaps.’

Having done this, he and I took up our positions in the forward part of the launch, and with glasses riveted upon the junk we

watched her every movement; and, sure enough, she took the course Kernot had suggested, sweeping boldly down the little bay. We, however, crept along in the shadow of the land, and, gaining rapidly on her, were well abreast of her before she reached the dock-gates. Then with wonderful suddenness she put about. We stopped also, and a few moments of suspense followed, moments in which I heard distinctly the hard breathing of my companion. Then for a second the luminous white sails shone out: the next, everything was buried in gloom.

And now, what was to be the next move? I for one was uncertain whether to advance to the attack, or to wait and watch; though very little reflection convinced me of the wisdom of the latter course. For, after all, what were we to attack? What right had we to raid in-offensive junks on the mere supposition that they were—what?—phantoms? My companion was evidently in the same quandary, though neither by word nor movement did he let me into the secret of his thoughts. With glasses glued to his eyes he did nothing but watch the shadow opposite.

At length, after what seemed an interminable period of waiting, we distinctly, if faintly, heard the swish, swish of the long steering scull of a sampan as it was twisted through the water. I touched Kernot on the arm to let him know that I heard and understood. Every second the swishing sounded nearer.

‘There are two men at the scull,’ he whispered. ‘It is as I supposed.’

Well, the rest of the story is quickly told. Waiting till the sampan was hidden behind the junk, which we knew would concentrate the attention of the junk’s crew to that side of their vessel, we advanced slowly out of the gloom and came up alongside the spectre just in time to catch her spectral crew handing out sundry cases of contraband opium.

Yes, they showed fight at first ; but when they knew that the redoubtable Kernot was aboard them they succumbed with a perfectly angelic grace. We towed them over to the dock-gates and made ourselves as comfortable as we could till day broke. Then, when we examined our prize, we found that our phantom ship was a very ordinary junk, the sails of which had been smeared over with some

luminous compound. A couple of ordinary bull's-eye lanterns did the rest. As for the phantom crew, they were subsequently identified by the authorities as gentlemen who had long been 'wanted.'

THE PASSENGER AFT

WE had only one passenger aft for Bangkok, and he was a Siamese who came scrambling aboard at the very moment of our weighing anchor. I was in charge of the gangway at the time, and to my inquiry as to his business he replied in very good English :

‘ This ship—*Amoy*—go Bangkok ? ’

‘ Yes. We are starting now.’

‘ Very good, Oyes, very good,’ and he smiled complacently. Then turning to the sampan which still lay alongside, he beckoned to its occupants, and presently half a dozen of his countrymen came tumbling up on deck.

‘ Passengers ? ’ I queried.

‘ Oyes, passengers, Oyes ! ’ and he continued to smile upon me in the most absurd manner. I scowled, for I knew that oily Eastern smile, and the value one may attach to it.

‘ You’ve got your tickets ? ’ I asked rather roughly.

‘Oyes, tickets, Oyes,’ and with another charming smile he produced them from an inner pocket of his blouse.

‘Very good,’ I said, handing them back to him after examination; ‘you go that way,’ and I motioned for him to go aft: ‘you chaps forward,’ and I pointed the way for his body-guard, who salaamed and grinned, and seemed just as amiable as he was.

The captain at that moment leant over the end of the bridge and yelled out, ‘Are you all clear there aft?’

‘All clear, sir.’

Then the engines began to throb, the screw ground the water white astern, and we slipped through the shipping with the ease and dignity of a tramp that knows its way.

The *Amoy* was only one of a well-known line of coasters. Sometimes our rivals called us the ‘dust-carts of the China Seas,’ sometimes the ‘scavengers’—it all depended on the mood they were in. At any rate, we were the very smallest of small fry. A mail-boat would not have condescended to signal us.

As our greatest speed only amounted to between eight and nine knots an hour, we had

plenty of time to settle down and get things ship-shape before we reached the mouth of the Menam. Plenty of time, also, to look about and give an eye to our Siamese passenger aft and his six friends forward. I admit I was suspicious of him : of the manner of his coming aboard ; of his secret, strange behaviour when on board—a suspicion which his oily Oriental smile failed to allay. Then, as I tramped the bridge during my watch, I often saw him forward in close confab with his associates ; and, once or twice, when unexpectedly approaching them, I thought they hid something away in their sashes which they did not want me to see.

That the fellows had come aboard for no good I firmly believed ; and this notwithstanding the fact that the captain, in some inexplicable manner, had almost taken a fancy to the passenger aft. Such an unheard-of thing as the old man chumming in with a native was a fact to be received with a certain amount of incredulity, notwithstanding the assurance of one's own eyes. Mr. Wilkinson may have been only a master mariner in a very humble way, but he had a deep religious belief in the superi-

ority of the white man. To him all coloured men were niggers, and niggers, like other vermin, were best kept at a distance. He would no more have thought of associating with one than the master of a mail-boat would have thought of associating with him. The world is crammed full of gods of various degrees.

But there is one thing to which the white man will cringe as readily as his yellow brother—perhaps more readily; and that is—gold. That, like death, is the true leveller; perhaps the truer. We soon found out that the passenger aft was rather a person of consequence in his own country, and that the six men who had come aboard with him were his own servants or retainers. At least, such was the story, and such the old man evidently believed; but I had not yet rid myself of my suspicions, and therefore accepted the rumours in my own way. It had been my experience to receive some very ugly treatment from natives where I least expected it, and the recollection made me wary.

Not that I absolutely could convince myself that Chowfa—for that was the least outlandish part of his outlandish name—was really a bad egg. Only I mistrusted all Orientals on

principle ; and even when he approached me with his winning smile and his affable ‘Oyes, good day—good day, Oyes,’ I regarded his affability as an insidious yellow wile. And yet at times, despite myself, I could not help wondering if I wronged the man. He had those horrid, soulless, Eastern eyes, which one never seems able to penetrate ; those eyes which have no depth, or, if they have, a depth one sees not into. How could one trust such eyes ? It would be flying in the face of reason, the natural promptings of perception. Yet, to give him his due, he was most affable to me, and seemed continually to put himself out of the way to attract my attention. He was usually the first to greet me when I came on deck ; when my watch was over he generally met me near the companion-way with a pleasant greeting and a good cigar.

In a way he admired me too—that is, he admired in me a certain vastness of limb which he did not possess. Once he even went so far as to seize my arm, and as I swung him off rather roughly—for I was not fancying any liberties just then—he smiled apologetically and murmured, ‘Oyes, plenty fight—plenty fight,

Oyes,' and something like a glow of excitement swept his dull face. I could not quite make him out. A fellow who looks pleased where another fellow would look angry is not to be trusted.

Though I had only been in the *Amoy* about six months, I was fortunate enough to find favour in the eyes of the captain, and more than once he had promised to make me his chief as soon as he could get rid of old Shiffles, who then occupied that exalted post. Of course I was deeply grateful, though I did not tell him that I had a different ambition from that of scavenging the China Seas. He meant well, the old man, and I ought to have been grateful.

The day before we got into Bangkok he came up on the bridge during my watch, and, after a good look round, beckoned for me to approach him.

‘Seen anything, Wilton?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Um. He took out his pipe and began to fill it.

‘What’s she doing?’ was his next question, which was one that struck me as being entirely

superfluous. If there was one person alive who could truly judge the rate of speed at which the *Amoy* travelled, it was her worthy skipper.

‘Nearly ten, sir, I should say.’

‘She’s got the tide with her?’

‘Undoubtedly.’

‘Um,’ said he, and bent to light his pipe. A dozen serious puffs followed, and, the tobacco burning to his liking, he turned once more to me.

‘Ever been in Bangkok?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Um! Queer place, queer doings. Our friend aft is a Siamese.’

‘So I understand.’

‘A decent sort of chap, too,’ said he somewhat emphatically. ‘I don’t know that I ever took to a nigger before. Just shows you, Wilton, what an absurd thing is prejudice. Now, I’ll go bail that you’re not burdened with anything half so ridiculous.’

‘No doubt I am much like other people.’

‘Ah, that’s your dashed modesty,’ he laughed. The old man was in a rare good-humour. ‘You’re a very milk-and-water sort of chap, I don’t think.’

Of course I blushed at this playful persiflage. The condescension of so great a man would have made any modest person blush. I said I hoped I had done nothing to lessen his good opinion of me.

‘On the contrary, my lad,’ he replied; ‘and it’s for that reason that I’ve come up here to have a chat with you now. I understand you and you understand me. It’s a tricky business, though, and my respected chief officer’s an ass. But I can trust you, Wilton,’ he added mysteriously; ‘you’re as mum as the grave, eh?’

‘I can keep a secret, sir, if that’s what you mean.’

‘Well, yes, it’s something of that nature. You see, this Siamese chap, Chowfa, as he calls himself, is a bit of a pot in Bangkok; but by what I can make out he left that city rather hurriedly. No doubt for the good of his health. His version is that he was unfortunate enough to arouse the envy, or jealousy, of some one at court. He hints at a very high personage—king, or king’s brother,—you pays your money. Well, this Johnnie, whoever he is, happened to take a fancy to Chowfa’s girl, or wife, or something of that sort, and a fancy

with such a personage meant ultimate possession. Chowfa tried to escape with her, but failed, and so the other Johnnie got her. Well, that's nothing. No doubt she liked the change. But poor old Chowfa just escaped with his life. Now he's coming back to try and carry her off.'

I confess to being a little taken aback at this story. It was so different from what I had imagined.

'And what is your opinion of this story, sir?'

'Well, when I got as far as you have, I thought it was a pack of dashed lies. So do you?'

I admitted as much. Putting several things together, I could not see the reasonableness of it.

'But how does he propose to carry her off?' I asked.

The captain withdrew his pipe from his mouth and bent his head nearer mine.

'He wants us to help him.'

'Us? How?'

'He offers me a good round sum—five thousand dollars, in fact—if I will receive her on my ship and take her back to Hong-Kong.'

I laughed. 'It is not often that a good action meets with such a goodly recompense.'

'Now look here,' he said, 'none of your jeering. You know well enough what I risk.'

'But, sir, five thousand dollars!'

'Yes,' he muttered reflectively; 'I admit it's a tidy lump.'

'And only for carrying a lady back to Hong-Kong! I would do it for half the money.'

'Dash you, Wilton,' he grumbled, 'I don't want any of your infernal nonsense. You know quite well that he's not offering me five thousand dollars just to take her back. You see, there's a bit more in it. The woman's very strictly guarded, and you know how these Eastern Johnnies can guard a woman.'

'I understand. To earn this sum you must first set the woman free?'

The old man smiled approvingly.

'Or get some one who will do it for me,' he said. 'The dollars are all right. I've handled them.'

Though I was sure I read the meaning of that insidious smile, I answered innocently enough, 'Surely no one would be better fitted for the task than Chowfa himself?'

‘That’s the awkward part of it. Chowfa assures me that he is so well known in Bangkok that he dare not set his foot ashore. But he has half a dozen trusty men who know every twist and turning of the city. If they could only get some man of sense and courage to lead them——’ He stopped short, looking hard at me.

‘You mean, sir——?’

‘I mean that there’s a thousand dollars for the man who can bring the girl off safely, and I believe you are that man.’

I mumbled a modest thanks. It was extremely gratifying to know that I was so greatly esteemed by my commander; but I had no particular liking for such adventures.

‘And if I don’t bring her off safely?’

‘Then you needn’t bother about the dollars.’

‘So there’s danger?’

‘Plenty.’

I thought his smile implied a reflection on my courage. It was a curious, quizzing, half-impertinent grin; a grin which said as plainly as it could, ‘Now, have you the courage for this, or am I mistaken in you?’ Being young, I resented the suggestion. In those days I

had the courage and the daring for anything ; though, as I said before, such adventures did not appeal strongly to my imagination. I daresay I would have screwed up courage enough to get my own girl out of a scrape, but I wasn't going to bother about other fellows'. And yet—here my practical good sense came in—a thousand dollars was not to be sneezed at by the second mate of a Chinese coaster who was in receipt of the magnificent sum of thirty dollars a month. It was a temptation, and I fell.

‘ I thought you wouldn't disappoint me,’ said the captain ; ‘ and, between you and me, Wilton, I guess it'll be worth more than a thousand dollars to you if it comes off all right. I don't hide the fact that there is an “if” in the matter. The chap who's got the girl is a thundering pot—quite a personage at court, so the passenger aft says. It will be no easy matter, and possibly may be a dangerous one. However, you've got a head on your shoulders, and a pair of big shoulders they are. If one fails you, the other ought to retrieve the loss. Chowfa and his men will get the lay of the land. You, to avert suspicion, will take charge

of the boat. We shall be here about ten days, but I don't think we shall require your services till the day before we start.'

The next morning we crossed the bar of the Menam and steamed slowly up to our anchorage, the passenger aft taking what seemed to me the most ridiculous precautions to avoid recognition. But I suppose he knew his own business. At any rate, it made me respect his rival. His followers appeared as sailors, and the old man gave out that he had taken them on in the place of some who were leaving at Bangkok. This was rather cunning of the captain, as it offered the fellows an excuse for staying aboard, and was to prove of use to me later on.

The men, however, left the ship as soon as it was dark, attired as ordinary coolies; but they were all back again at daybreak, and had duly reported to their master, who in turn bore his report to the captain, through whom it reached me. The men, as I guessed, had been spying, and would continue to do so till the time was ripe for a forward movement.

Chowfa, all this time, clung to the ship like a barnacle, never by any chance showing him-

self on deck while any strangers were aboard. Sometimes he joined me of an evening on deck after the work was done, and we had a smoke together. Then he would try to tell me in his broken English how deeply grateful he was to me, and with his soft, buttery ways would work so on my feelings that I invariably promised to do all that a bold Briton could to rescue his beloved. Poor chap! When you come to think of it, it is a bit hard to have your girl carried off in such an arbitrary manner. Seeing the resentment in my eyes, he would give my shoulder an admiring pat, or my arm, which would have made three of his, a loving squeeze, and murmur, 'Oyes, plenty fight—plenty fight, Oyes.' He also conveyed to me the desire that, should I come in personal contact with Kha, which was the name of the villain who retained Chowfa's treasure, I would summarily flatten him. All of which I faithfully promised.

We had been quietly lying at the buoys about a week, when one morning the captain told me to get out one of our after boats, which I had no sooner done than he advanced and informed me that he wished to give his new men a little boat-practice. Indeed, I was not surprised

when, on looking over the stern, I perceived one of Chowfa's men already in the boat. Chowfa himself was on deck, and at a word from him the boat was hauled round to the gangway. Then, as at a given signal, four or five men slipped down into it. It is needless to add that they were Chowfa's men.

‘This being a ship's boat, and in charge of a ship's officer, it is not likely to be questioned,’ said the old man, coming out on the gangway to me; ‘but, to save appearances, you might purchase provisions of some sort. For the rest, you may safely leave yourself in the hands of these fellows. They'll show you the road to the bird's cage.’

I smiled, and descending entered the boat; the men in the bows pushed off, the others got out their oars, and away we went. The stream flowed pretty hard just then, for the flood-water had not yet run off; but my men laid to with a will, plainly showing that they were no novices at the game. So much, at any rate, was satisfactory. If it came to a keen pursuit they were equal to a ding-dong struggle.

Up the stream we went for about two miles, till the man in the bows pointed out an opening

on my right, which looked like the entrance to a creek or canal. I immediately turned into it, and presently a landing-stage and several sampans opened up, the occupants of the latter favouring us with but an informal stare as we passed. I brought our boat in against the stage and stepped ashore, the man in the bows following me.

‘Are you coming with me?’ I asked.

‘Yes, mas’r.’

The other fellows had already dropped down a boat’s-length or two. I nodded approval. Then my companion and I set out, he walking a dozen yards or so astern of me, but coming forward to direct me whenever we came to a turning. In this way we steered an intricate course for about half a mile, at the end of which we ran foul of a high stone wall, round the inside of which several fairly large trees grew. Here my companion advanced smiling.

‘Is this the place?’

‘Yes, mas’r.’

‘Um!’ I looked puzzled, for I could not see how we were to enter through the solid mass of mud and stone.

The man saw the look in my face, and

pointed up to the tree. I could see nothing there, but presently he undid the sash from his waist, and made a pretence of throwing it over one of the boughs. Catching the gleam of understanding in my eye, he smiled and motioned for me to follow him, which I did round the wall for about two hundred paces. Here he stopped against a low gate, shook it and smiled. His meaning was obvious. He would mount the wall by the aid of the tree, then creep round and open the gate for me to enter. Very fine arrangement, thought I: I only hope it will be as easy as it looks. I then retraced my steps, and succeeded in reaching the boat without the aid of my guide. So far so good. I did not forget to make some purchases on the way back.

Of course the captain was eager for my report, and when he heard all that I had to say he confessed that I had a soft thing on, and that it would be the easiest thousand dollars I had ever earned. I thought likewise of those five thousand dollars, and how much easier their earning would be for him. I, however, expressed much doubt concerning the easiness of my task, more particularly mentioning the

trouble I would have to find the woman even though I gained admittance to the grounds.

‘I wondered if you’d think of that,’ he said, ‘or if you’d go blindly at it in sailor-man fashion. My dear fellow, you’ll be led direct to the lady. The man who acted as guide was once a servant of Kha’s. He knows every twist and turning of the blessed house from top to bottom.’

I felt relieved. Certainly the difficulties seemed chiefly to consist of the vapours of my own imagination. Perhaps the skipper was as near his five thousand dollars as he hoped.

Every day after this I took the boat up to the same landing-stage, and went ashore, returning with provisions of some sort, till our coming and going evoked no sign of interest from the lethargic sampan people.

And so gradually the time grew near for the great attempt, and one day, just before breakfast, the captain approached me with a serious face.

‘We shall drop down the stream at five this afternoon,’ he said, ‘so you must make the attempt to-night. We shall clear the bar before dusk and apparently sail away south.

So we shall ; but in the dark we will feel our way back and lie-to within half a dozen miles of the bar. If your adventure succeeds and you pass the forts safely, give us a flare at your discretion, and we will answer it. We shall wait for you till daybreak.'

There was nothing more to be said. If day-break did not find me somewhere off the mouth of the Menam, it would probably be because I was at the bottom of that stream. However, I meant to leave as little to chance as possible, so I armed myself with a six-chambered revolver and a dozen extra cartridges, and saw that my men were similarly equipped : indeed, their equipment was more complete than mine, for, in addition to his revolver, each man carried a long sheath-knife not unlike a Malay creese. I also had some provisions stowed away in the after part of the boat, likewise a fair-sized keg of water, thinking it just as well to be prepared for any contingency. I also took a dress similar to that which my men wore, and pigment to darken my skin, though, truth to tell, the sun had done that well enough.

Shortly after two bells, or five o'clock, I

intimated to the old man that I was ready, and we walked together towards the gangway, he imploring me to refrain from all rashness, and be sure not to use force unless absolutely necessary. I don't know what he took me for, but I assured him that I hoped with all my heart I should meet with no opposition, and I meant it. For, now that the important moment had come, I experienced some anxiety concerning the business—chiefly, I think, through the extreme vagueness of my plans. Imagination and distance had lent a certain glamour to the project; but now that the eventful hour had really come, reflection added the most unpleasant reminder that I was rushing somewhat blindly and foolishly upon the unknown. But it was too late now. If stupidity had its proverbial luck, all might be well: if not, we should be in a deuce of a corner.

Chowfa was by the engine-room skylight, talking seriously to his head man, the fellow who had been my guide; and as the captain and I approached, the fellow with a low salaam skipped from his master's side and descended the gangway, I following him a few moments later.

‘Take care of yourself, Wilton,’ whispered the captain, ‘and for God’s sake don’t hurt any one if you can help it.’

I shook my head. Was it likely? I only hoped that no one would hurt me.

‘Remember,’ he continued, ‘we shall hang outside the entrance till daybreak. Good luck to you.’

‘Thank you, sir.’

I ran down the gangway and pushed off. A last glance at the old packet as my men bent to their oars revealed the red, excited face of the skipper, and the thoughtful yellow face of Chowfa. Forward the mate was cursing lustily among the men, but, looking over the side, he waved his big hairy hand. Somehow I wondered if I should ever see him again.

The voyage up the stream was accomplished satisfactorily, and the landing duly effected. Then, having to kill time the best way I could, I took my guide with me and rambled through the city, cautioning the men on no account to leave the boat,—a caution which I had good reason to believe they implicitly obeyed; for, returning after dark, and hailing the boat, I found them at their post. Then I put off into

the stream and donned my native dress, and added the dark pigment to my already dark skin, the result of which left me a tolerable Siamese, albeit my bulk was considerably out of proportion to my assumed nationality.

Pulling back to the landing-stage, my guide and I quickly stepped ashore, and made off in the darkness, two more of my men following at a discreet distance. The three others were left in charge of the boat with the injunction to be ready at a moment's notice.

The night was clear, if dark, and not the one I should have chosen for our adventure had choice been given me ; but it would probably be some two or three hours before the moon rose, before which time I hoped to have accomplished my purpose.

In the meantime my companion and I walked swiftly and silently on, the few people we met taking no more notice of us than if we were what we seemed. Consequently we reached our destination without let or hindrance. Here, crouching beneath the big wall, in the shadow of the trees, we waited till our two followers approached. Then my guide, speaking in a low undertone, sent one to the right and one to

the left of us, at which piece of precaution I duly nodded approval. The fellow's eyes fairly blazed with excitement. Whether it was with joy at thought of serving the new master, or paying off a grudge against the old, I could not say ; but, knowing something of his story, I may have had my suspicions.

But meanwhile he was nervously unwinding a rope which he had secreted about his waist, and which I guessed to be some six or seven fathoms long. He grinned and gibbered and carried on rather idiotically during this operation ; but, though intensely excited, he evidently had his wits about him, and, by the triumphant flashes he turned on me, those wits were conjuring up a singular series of pictures.

To the end of the line was attached a little bag of sand weighing about two pounds ; and, as I took this up to examine it, the fellow grinned hideously, pointed up into the tree, and swung his arm. I understood the pantomime, and duly admired the ingenuity. Nothing had been forgotten, and I was quite willing to credit all the old man had said about the girl having been prepared for our coming. Had she not been, I foresaw no end of complications.

Just then my guide stepped back, and swinging the bag once, twice, three times, he launched it into space. There was a rustling of leaves overhead as the missile forced its way through the foliage ; then, hand over hand, he began to pay out the line till presently the little bag floated on a level with our faces. To seize it, to test the position, was the work of a moment ; but he had neither misjudged his aim nor the strength of the bough. Then, with another frightened, diabolical grin on his ugly face, he seized the line and went up it hand over hand like a monkey. I watched him till he was lost in the foliage, but I knew by the cracking overhead that he had reached his perch safely, and was making his way along the bough. He would, of course, descend on the inside by the trunk of the tree.

After waiting till I knew he had safely negotiated the aforesaid bough, I hauled on the free end of the line, and pulled it over ; then, coiling it up, carried it with me to the gate, not wishing any chance passer-by to stumble on it unawares. The gate reached, I laid the line beside it, and anxiously awaited further developments.

For a long time—several minutes it seemed to me, though possibly it was not that—no sound came to tell me that my friend on the other side was moving. My anxiety increased by leaps and bounds, and I was just picturing him falling an easy prey to the watchful Kha, when I heard a gentle attempt on the gate. So gentle was it that any one passing, who had no cause for suspicion, would not have noticed it. I scratched gently by way of an answer, but, to my surprise, he did not reply. Indeed, for a full minute no sound whatever came from the other side. Then suddenly some hurried work began, the gate was quickly opened, and I pulled in.

‘You’ve been a devil of a time,’ I growled.

‘Oyes, mas’r—plenty care, mas’r.’

‘Why didn’t you open the gate at first?’

He pulled my ear down to him and whispered, ‘Kha’s people watch alongside gate. Expect some one.’

I could not restrain a sudden gasp. Phew! It was a close shave. How close I did not tell him, for he was almost fainting as it was.

Closing the gate noiselessly, he seized me by the hand, and dragged me into an adjacent

shrubbery by the wall, where I deposited the coil of rope, and there we stood for a good three minutes anxiously straining our eyes and ears. But, no sound of an unusual nature reaching us, we were forced to the conclusion that the watcher, whoever he was, or for what reason he had been there, had surely betaken himself within doors.

Motioning for me to follow, my guide, who seemed to know every inch of the ground, skirted the wall for some hundred yards or so, and then bore straight across to the house, seeking the shadow of every shrub and tree that lay in his way. In this manner, and by means of persistent dodging, waiting, and listening, we advanced well up to the house, in the shadow of which we rested a while, to still our nerves, I think, almost as much as to gain our breath.

A low verandah, over which grew a profusion of rose-scented creeper, seemed to surround the house. By the occasional tinkling of a guitar, and the low laughter of women which now and again came rippling out through the open window, I guessed, and not untruly, that this building was the worthy Kha's seraglio. Here

it was, according to arrangement, that we were to meet the beautiful Pakna, the well-beloved of Chowfa, who was too great a lord to risk his skin for the sake of his adored one.

My guide, who seemed uncommonly nervous, and who had not yet got over the fright of seeing a man at the gate, evidently wished to find out for certain where the man had gone. Therefore, warning me with uplifted hand to keep still, he started from my side, and disappeared as noiselessly as a shadow.

For a long time I stood there, scarcely daring to breathe; but as there was no sign of him returning, and as my patience was fast getting exhausted, I decided to do a little exploring on my own account. Full of that intent, I parted the creepers on my left, and was about to step on to the verandah, when from an open window opposite I saw a dark form emerge. Immediately drawing back, I held my breath and watched, but whether the form belonged to a man or a woman I could not say. However, I was soon assured, for, after standing at the window some little time, the figure turned away with a sigh. I remembered all. She had been warned: she was waiting. Her

deep sigh denoted intense disappointment. At least, such was the way I read it, and I acted accordingly.

‘Hist!’

It was low, soft, but clear as a bell, and was done almost involuntarily. I confess to a few extra heart-beats just then. Would my imprudence ruin me?

Luck was looking my way for once. She stopped, peered irresolutely forward, and then advanced a step.

‘Pakna!’ I whispered, in a tone as sweet as Chowfa himself could use.

Again she sighed, and this time stretched towards me, muttering something in the native tongue. Guessing that she asked who I was, I replied in the same voice, ‘Chowfa.’

This name made an extraordinary impression upon her, and, hesitating no longer, she advanced to where I was hiding. I immediately parted the creeper and stepped on to the verandah beside her. She retreated with a little cry of alarm. To reassure her I repeated ‘Chowfa, Chowfa,’ and by sundry gesticulations gave her to understand that I had come to convey her to her lord. Luckily, at that

moment my guide advanced, and, seeing us together, he fell on his knees before her and bowed his head in the dust. Then she said something in a soft, low voice, and he arose, still salaaming as he did so.

‘She understand, mas’r,’ he whispered. ‘Plenty ready—minute.’

The woman retreated back through the window: we slunk again into the shrubbery and there anxiously awaited her reappearance.

She seemed an unconscionable time in coming, and I began inwardly to fume. We might easily have been half-way to the boat by now but for her cursed dilatoriness. What the deuce did she want to go back for when I was there and everything ready for her escape? Her few trumpery trinkets, I guessed, which was so like a woman, and which would probably prove her ruin. It is always the same. No matter how near to foundering the ship may be, there is always some madman who stays to dress, some miser who rushes below to seize his little hoard—and goes down with the ship.

My impatience was gradually giving way to a generous rage, when she again appeared upon

the scene. This time she bore a considerable bundle in her hand, proving the truth of my surmise. Feeling extremely ungracious, I again stepped on to the verandah and extended my hand for the bundle, when all of a sudden a heavy footfall sounded on the path not a dozen yards away. With a half-stifled cry of alarm the woman instantly seized my hand and drew me through the window into the house. My guide, whose head only had poked through the creeper, withdrew at once.

The room was quite dark, but, as she still held my hand and guided me, the darkness was no great inconvenience. She led me swiftly right across the room till I felt a curtain brush against my face—the curtain, I guessed, which partitioned off an inner chamber. Here she stopped, and we involuntarily turned together. Looking backward, the open window was distinctly to be seen, and further on, in the dim light, the dark shadow of the creepers. But these are only such things as come to thought afterwards: then we heard only the footsteps, which were now upon the verandah; saw, in imagination, nothing but the

owner thereof. Then, like an apparition, his form suddenly blocked up the entrance.

I felt her little hand tremble, but pressed it reassuringly, and, terrified as she was, she gave me an answering pressure.

But in the meantime the man, speaking sharply, like one who is accustomed to command, stepped into the room ; but apparently liking not the darkness, and receiving no answer, he as quickly skipped back to the window, from which position he spoke again in a louder, shriller key. There was a note of excitement, of suspicion, in his voice which I did not like. I feared, his suspicions once aroused, that he would call for help : then good-bye to all hope of a peaceful elopement. There was nothing for it now but to seize the bull by the horns—but how? The woman answered the unspoken question for me, and answered it in my own way. Drawing my face down to hers, she put her mouth to my ear and breathed, ‘Kha,’ at the same time doubling up my fist, which to her, no doubt, seemed big enough and strong enough to fell an elephant.

I was not slow to act upon the suggestion.

Placing the bundle on the floor, I stole from her side, and almost before he was aware of it I confronted him. When he saw me, a coolie in the women's quarters, his voice took a mighty horrid tone, and he actually raised his hand as though to strike. Now, it has always been a guiding principle of mine to get in, if possible, the first blow, and acting on this principle I let out: his nose came in contact with my knuckles, and over he went. But I had only injured, not stunned him, and as he rolled on the verandah he set up a most horrible howling. Knowing what this meant, and that in a minute or two we should have the whole place about our ears, I stepped back into the room and called, 'Pakna, Pakna!' She was instantly by my side, her hand in mine, and as we passed by the howling Kha she stopped for a second or two to administer sundry savage kicks and hiss out something decidedly unpleasant. I could not help smiling, serious as the position was.

The guide was already half through the shrubbery and brandishing his ugly knife in a way I did not like, especially as I knew he had a personal grudge against Kha. So I

flung Pakna's bundle at him and told him to run and open the gate.

'Yes, mas'r,' he cried, but before obeying me he spat disdainfully towards the twisting figure, which continued to make a most infernal din. I had a great inclination to send him to sleep, and the rather trying position I was in might have justified the act; but I merely knelt on his stomach and gagged him with his own silk sash. Even that was too late. His howling had already roused the place. Voices, hurried, excited voices, called to each other from different parts of the building, while here and there lights began to flash. There was not a moment to lose, so I seized Pakna by the hand and hurried with all speed towards the gate. There stood my guide in readiness. As we approached, he opened the gate and we passed out, he following with a triumphant laugh.

By this time the shouts within the grounds had reached an alarming pitch, but fortunately we were on the right side of the wall. I gave the word forward, my guide and I with Pakna between us leading the way, my other two men, who joined us immediately we emerged

from the garden, bringing up the rear. Pakna, being but a young woman, was as light of foot as either of us, so that we fairly bounded along the dark streets, never stopping to look round till we had reached the landing-stage.

Luckily the boat was in readiness. I stepped aboard and helped the woman after me, when she sank upon the seat shivering and crying and scarcely able to breathe; at which I did not wonder, for I was fairly winded myself. Then the guide stepped aboard, followed by the rear-guard: I gave the order to push off, and we shot into the middle of the stream. And apparently none too soon, for, ere we had half cleared the little creek, a white-robed figure bounded on to the landing-stage we had just quitted and began wildly to shout at us. Soon this figure was joined by three or four others, and then a turn in the stream hid them from view.

I breathed more freely when we had cleared the creek and were fairly on the river, right down the middle of which I steered. The four rowers laid to with a good will, and for a time the banks seemed to skim by us; but ours was a heavy, clumsy craft, a regular rough-

water boat, and required an amount of propulsion which meant the quick exhaustion of muscular energy. Still I kept them at full pressure for a couple of miles, when of their own accord they took an easy. I kept a good look-out ahead and astern, but fortunately no pursuer hove in view.

Down past the shipping we flew, past the buoys from which the old *Amoy* had cast loose that very afternoon, and the free river stretched before us. I now regained my usual composure, and, having partaken of a good pull at the whisky-flask, I felt in such an excellent humour that I could have bellowed a chanty for very joy.

Happily the whisky had not absorbed all my practical common-sense. I was not yet out of the wood: I could not feel the thousand dollars nestling sweetly in my breast-pocket. But, by the Lord, I meant to. I had no doubt now that all pursuit was at an end. The great adventure had been accomplished in the most satisfactory manner, and, feeling quite safe, I lit my pipe. Then I called an easy to the men. We had plenty of time. It would be two or three hours yet before daybreak.

The woman all this time lay coiled up where she had at first fallen, and now that I had time to pay her a little attention I offered her a biscuit and some water, and told her in the best way I could that she had nothing more to fear. She looked up quite pitifully at me and shook her head. I laughingly shook mine in return, and motioned for her to eat; but, though she drank the water greedily, she only nibbled the biscuit. I told my guide to speak to her in the native tongue and reassure her; but he replied that she would not be reassured, as she still feared the vengeance of Kha. Knowing something of the perverseness of the sex, and how they will be just that which they are bent upon being, I left her to her own reflections and smoked away in silence.

In the meantime we had been floating quietly down the stream, the men resting on their oars. The moon was now out, and lit up the water ahead and astern to quite a considerable distance, so that, turning round for a last view before ordering the men on again, I caught the shadow of a moving object far astern. A moment or two of anxious scrutiny convinced me that the object was a boat, and that it was

undoubtedly coming down-stream. I gave the order coolly enough for the men to pull, but their quick eyes had discovered the object almost as soon as mine, and they needed no great urging.

For a while our boat fairly flew, but, travel as we would, we could not shake off the shadow astern ; and, as my men soon tired, the shadow began to gain on us in an alarming manner. Quickly seeing the futility of trying to show a clean pair of heels, and knowing how the effort would exhaust my men for the final tussle, I loosened my revolver, letting them see the action. Then I ordered them to go easy. Profiting by my example, they also felt with one hand for their pistols, while with the other they made a pretence of rowing. The woman, luckily, was as yet unconscious of the proximity of the pursuers, for she sat quite still, her head on her breast, her legs doubled up under her.

Soon the object was near enough for me to see that it was a big sampan with four oars going forward, while two men tugged desperately at the long steering-scutt astern. Our heavy boat had not a ghost of a chance with

such a light, shallow thing propelled by half a dozen trained rowers.

As it came up astern of us hand over hand I hailed it, fearing it was their intention to run us down.

‘Hullo, there!’ I shouted. ‘Look where you’re coming!’

I was answered in the native tongue, my guide translating:

‘What boat is that?’

‘The gig of the steamship *Amoy*. What are you?’

For a moment there was no reply. Then the voice said, ‘The *Amoy* left for Hong-Kong at half-past five this afternoon.’

‘I know. We missed her. She is to wait for us at Koh-si-Chang. Go on, men.’

Away we went once more, but apparently without satisfying the people in the sampan, who immediately started in pursuit. The woman, clasping my knees, looked up imploringly into my face. She had heard what passed, and guessed its meaning; but I assured her that I would never give her up, and, though she did not comprehend a word of English, I am sure she understood me. She kissed my

hand passionately and sank sobbing at my feet. I patted her head kindly, and covered her with my greatcoat.

But meanwhile the sampan had come close up astern, and the fellow in the bows hooked us with his boat-hook. With an angry exclamation I immediately sprang up and seized it, and, as I did so, a triumphant shout rose from the pursuers. This disconcerted me for the moment, though its meaning came to me like a flash. I had forgotten that I was still in native dress.

Then the sampan came alongside. They told us they knew who we were, and suggested that we might guess who they were: that they would not molest us if we gave up the woman, but in any case they meant to have her. I answered that I was sorry to disoblige them, but the woman had come into my hands, and I meant to keep her. I also warned them to sheer off lest harm befell them; for, though I was a man of peace, I could not submit to the indignity of being dictated to by a bunch of niggers. They, however, took no heed of my warning. Therefore, still guided by my principle of having first shot, I fired at the sampan

just on the water-line, and think I must have put a couple of bullets through it. At all events there was a fearful spluttering and shouting, which excitement proving favourable to us, we sheered off and soon put a dozen boat's-lengths between us. But once their surprise was over, anger gave them courage, and with wild shouts they came dashing after us. I slipped a couple more cartridges into the empty chambers of my revolver, and then faced them.

On they came with awful yelling and shouting, apparently thinking to intimidate us by their ferocious cries. As they came within four or five boat's-lengths of us, my fear for our safety got the better of my discretion, and I emptied my revolver at them. This was answered by a heavy fire in return, though fortunately too high. I heard the bullets hiss through the air above me.

Then began a running fight, all my energies being concentrated upon hitting the boat in a serious place. Indeed, the better to take aim at her I exposed myself to some pretty shooting. But then I was not used to war, and, like a fool, thought nothing of cover. Indeed, one

bullet tore the flesh from my shoulder : another laid low my guide, who dropped forward on his knees and held his hands to his side. But the rowers swung on apparently uninjured, and I admired the coolness of the brave fellows.

But our pursuers, finding they got none the best of the exchanges at long range, now began rapidly to overhaul us, and, guessing their intention, I seized a spare oar and awaited the onslaught. My men, watching my movements, loosened their sheath-knives. I saw their eyes gleam. Even the guide, wounded as he was, seized his boat-hook and stood on guard.

In a moment they were on us. The two boats ground against each other ominously. Then a fearful confusion followed. There was an indiscriminate smashing of oars, a flashing of knives, a babel of voices. The screeching was something horrid. I laid about me with my great oar, and made more than one worthy coolie grunt. The man next to me used his as a spear, and poked the sharp, solid handle at his adversaries. The others used their knives or oars as best they could, and for about three minutes a furious fight ensued.

Then suddenly a great cry of alarm came

from the sampan. Their boat was surely sinking. In their excitement they had evidently not noticed it, but now there could no longer be any doubt. The sampan was going down by the head. They therefore sheered off immediately, and the battle ceased. Whether the sampan sank or not I cannot say, for no sooner were they well clear of us than we pushed forward on our journey.

My guide was wounded seriously, while all the other men had more or less received hard knocks ; but we did what we had to do, and in the early haze of the following morning the old *Amoy* picked us up.

CHIEF OFFICER GROVER

FOR over two months we had swung idly at anchor in the harbour of Hong-Kong. Business in the shipping world had been exceedingly slack, and when a tramp came in to discharge she was never sure when she would go out again. Our last voyage had been from Nagasaki with coal. Accordingly, after getting rid of that objectionable stuff, we had plenty of time to clean up. For the rest, our hull made a good anchorage for the barnacles.

But one day the captain came aboard and sent for the chief officer, and then the news leaked out that we were presently to make a move. We had been chartered to run down to Saigon, load up with rice, and return to Hong-Kong—a voyage, at the longest, of three weeks' duration. I for one should have preferred Bombay or Sydney, but the fiat had gone forth, and Saigon it was to be.

The person who had chartered us was one Ah Yeh, a well-known merchant on the island, and, so some said, much better known than respected. But be that as it may, Ah Yeh was a man of considerable wealth and influence, and as such held a responsible position in the commercial world. A man who can meet present liabilities need not fear his antecedents; and if Ah Yeh had any black marks against his name, no one cared to remind him of them. Yet some curious tales were set afloat concerning him. It was said that he had originally been a sampan coolie, and that by dint of super-excellence in cunning he had risen to be one of the foremost native merchants of South China. But there is usually a stiff price paid for greatness, and Ah Yeh's case was no exception to the rule. Success brought its attendant evils, which Ah Yeh declared were killing him; and yet he throve and waxed fat.

On the two or three occasions I had the honour of visiting him at his office, I found him particularly charming. He came out into the shop when he knew I was there, asked me into his inner sanctum, cracked a pint of champagne, and filled my case with cigars.

Speaking in excellent English, and with a peculiarly soft and winning accent, he began to question me about the ship, displaying a great interest in all that pertained to the life of a sailor. I can see him now as he put his questions, his smooth, yellow, not unhandsome face all aglow with intelligence, and a motive I could not then fathom; his little black eyes dancing into mine, the long nail on the little finger of his left hand with which he lovingly scratched the tip of his nose. I remember, though thinking little of it then, the stress he laid on the dangers of a voyage to Saigon, particularly when near the Paracels. He had heard of those rocks, of the many vessels that had rushed upon them to their doom; and in his innocent, earnest fashion he wanted to know if I was very much afraid of them. I laughed at the idea, and Ah Yeh laughed too, but there was not much spontaneity or mirth about it. And then, with the same appearance of extreme innocence, he wondered if ships were sometimes wrecked on purpose, and what remuneration a responsible officer expected for the work. I did not answer, and Ah Yeh, smiling more insinuatingly than ever, said he

should be pleased to hear my views on the subject. Appealed to thus, I spoke somewhat hotly on the matter, and in a very few moments I knew I had a most inattentive listener. Then Ah Yeh rose rather brusquely and told me he would be pleased to see me the next time I was passing that way. One is naturally wiser after the event, though it seems absurd that I should have thought so little about my cross-examination. In the face of what happened, it seems incredible that my perception should have failed so lamentably.

The day before we sailed, Ah Yeh sent aboard a supercargo and half a dozen clerks, and a villainous-looking batch they were, the supercargo in particular with his flat cheeks, flat forehead, and flat eyes being a most forbidding blackguard. But ugliness being the common heritage of the Mongol, one soon begins to pass it by without comment. Ah Yeh's yellow batch was, after all, no serious libel on the country.

Well, early the following morning, away we went, and during the voyage down nothing of an eventful nature befell us. The weather was comfortably cool, the sea smooth, and, though we were no great shakes at speed, we

made fairly good progress, though the barnacles we had accumulated in Hong-Kong impeded us somewhat.

Very little was seen of the supercargo or his assistants. Occasionally they appeared on deck, but the greater part of the time they spent below gambling and smoking. There was, however, one exception. The supercargo, Wong, was a man of an inquiring turn of mind, and seemed to take considerable interest in affairs aboard. At first he tried to hobnob with me, but when he found that I wouldn't have any truck with him, he sought out the mate, and I watched with some degree of disgust the intimacy between them ripen. To be sure, everything was done secretly, but two or three times I had surprised them drinking together in the mate's cabin, and, by the guilty way my superior officer started, I knew that he was ashamed of himself. Nor was it whisky or rum that they drank, nor any such common sailor's tippie, but champagne—good whizzing, fizzing champagne. Of course I knew how the stuff got there—indeed, the triumphant gleam of Wong's flat eyes assured me ; but it was not my place to remonstrate with my chief. I

might deplore the circumstance, but could do nothing more.

Our mate was rather a common type of sailor-man, the kind of fellow you would expect to hear had begun life forward, but by dint of perseverance had succeeded in getting his ticket. How he ever got it was always a wonder to me, for he was a singularly faulty navigator and not a particularly clever seaman. His appearance was not prepossessing. Indeed, it rather foolishly made you take a dislike to the man at first sight. There is, however, nothing romantic about a short, thickset figure, and without doubt Mr. Grover's figure was both short and thickset; and, though he carried his big head well forward, as though his neck were too weak to bear it, I can vouch for the exceeding stoutness of that neck. A black, untrimmed beard spread itself over his face right up to his eyes, which eyes, and a short, red protuberance which he called his nose, were his only visible features. Not an attractive man, perhaps, and yet such was a very fair outline of Mr. Daniel Grover, chief officer of the s.s. *Malacca*.

He had not been with us for more than five

months ; and though I don't think he ever gave the old man any great cause for satisfaction, he never, as far as I'm aware, gave him any serious cause for uneasiness. We had picked Mr. Grover up in Singapore, and, though a good man may occasionally be found there, it is not the best of ports to hail from. Good, reliable men, as a rule, are not found stranded in the East ; men of a certain class are to be found in any number. Grover's discharge must have been all right or the old man would never have taken him ; though I have known skippers so hard pressed at times that they were glad enough to take anything they could get. At any rate, Grover joined us at Singapore, and I was not sufficiently in the captain's confidence to know the why or the wherefore. I only know that we wanted a chief mate, and that Mr. Daniel Grover came aboard. Though his appearance was against him, he and I got on very well together—for a few weeks. He seemed a bluff, hearty, good-natured sort of sailor-man with no pretension to class ; and, after all, class is not of the utmost importance to those who go down to the sea in tramps. He appeared to be a decent enough fellow, and

that was sufficient. Before we left the Japan ports, I knew Mr. Daniel Grover for quite a different sort of person.

But in the meantime I have left the ship rapidly approaching Saigon, which port we duly reached, and, when we had loaded, as duly cleared again. True, Grover, during the operation of loading, did not forget to cultivate his intimacy with the supercargo Wong; but nothing of any moment happened till we were clear of the river. Then, when everything was going well above, the captain having set the course and gone below, leaving the third in charge of the bridge, I went to look the chief up, and found him squatting on his bunk, his legs dangling over the side, a pipe in his mouth, and a tumbler of champagne in his hand. The supercargo Wong was squatting on the settee opposite, his legs curled up under him, a tumbler in one hand, a bottle of champagne in the other, and a cheroot stuck between his thick lips, the thin end protruding.

‘Come in, Emson,’ cried the mate cheerily, as soon as he caught sight of me; ‘come in, man, and have a glass of grog. You look as miserable as a flayed bloater, damn me if

you don't! Here, Wong, you soor, tip up the rum!

'None, thanks; not just now,' I said, seeing that my respected chief was already three sheets in the wind, and having no wish to fraternise with the curious Wong.

'Rot!' shouted the mate. 'Tip it up, Wong, you soor!'

'Welly good,' said Mr. Wong insinuatingly, making the bubbles dance in the glass as he held it out to me. 'This lum allee same belong first chop. Same as Cap'n dlink when he go see top-side girlee,' and out of his little flat eyes he gave me an intensely knowing look. The mate roared hilariously at the joke, and with his heels beat an excited tatoo on the locker.

'This Wong's a soor,' he said admiringly, 'but he does carry the right stuff and no mistake. Now, Emson, drink up. Here's a prosperous voyage to the good ship *Malacca*, and may she never go to the bottom till her insurance will make it worth her while!'

'I dlink,' said Mr. Wong, 'to the good ship *Malacca*.' And as he emptied his tumbler, he looked at the mate in a way that made me feel quite sick.

‘Now, Emson,’ cried that worthy, evidently determined that I should join the carousal, ‘you can’t with decency refuse to drink such a toast.’

‘I never drink champagne,’ I said.

‘Neither do I,’ he grinned, ‘especially when I can’t get it. But what, may I ask, is your especial tippie, Mr. Particular?’

‘It all depends on the occasion,’ I replied.

‘Oh, I see,’ he sneered, ‘we ain’t good enough for you. Wong’s a blasted Chink, and I’m a——’

‘Blasted fool!’

He sprang off his bunk, his eyes blazing with anger, and, shaking a hairy fist in my face, roared, ‘Look here, Mr.—Particular, for two pins I’d flatten you! Son of a sea-cook!’ he growled. ‘Bah! they breed better men than you on a Thames penny-packet.’

‘And cast them adrift at Singapore,’ I said.

His flushed eyes grew very searching as he looked into my face.

‘What do you mean?’ he muttered.

‘Just what you like,’ I answered; ‘and when we get to Hong-Kong I’ll trouble you to step across to the Kowloon side and repeat in my

face what you have just now said.' With that I turned and quitted the cabin, a string of infamous oaths following me along the alleyway.

Nothing of any consequence happened for the next two days. He had always an ugly look for me, and he gave his orders in much the way that a man would speak to a dog ; but his tone of voice was a thing I could not very well resent ; moreover, he was my superior officer, and discipline forbade any questioning on my part. As for the curious Wong, he kept himself out of the way as much as possible, though I knew that he and the mate were still as thick as thieves.

I being the second officer always took the middle watch, and on the third morning out, a minute or two after eight bells had struck, the mate duly made his appearance to relieve me. I was standing in the starboard corner of the bridge at the time, keeping a good look-out, and thinking of the proximity of the Paracels, when he stepped over to me. As soon as he spoke I knew he had been drinking heavily. His voice vibrated shockingly as he asked me if I had seen anything.

‘No,’ I answered, as civilly as I could, ‘but we can’t be very far off. The captain cautions a good look-out, and says he is to be called immediately anything is seen.’

I think he resented my tone of imparting information, for he muttered something uncomplimentary under his breath and then lurched across to the binnacle. I immediately descended the bridge.

But, instead of going straight to my cabin, I stood for a minute or two looking hard out across the starboard bow, and thinking in a persistent irritating sort of way of the dangerous shoals lying out yonder; for, try as I would, I could not disconnect them and the man on the bridge. Of course I knew my misgivings were the very height of absurdity, but as I peered out into the darkness I entertained some most distressing thoughts.

Presently I heard the mate speak to the man at the wheel, his coarse voice easily reaching where I stood:

‘What’s she steering, quartermaster?’

I could not catch the reply, though I knew quite well what it would be. There was a moment’s pause. Then the mate spoke again:

‘Are you quite sure?’

‘Quite, sir. That’s as Johnson gave it to me.’ Johnson was the quartermaster whom this man had relieved.

I heard the mate mutter something, and then I knew by the direction his voice took that he had gone into the chart-room.

For a while nothing was heard but the grind, grind of the screw, the splash of the waves as they fell back from the ship’s bows. Then presently the mate emerged from the chart-room, and, after taking half a dozen excited turns up and down the bridge, he stopped alongside the binnacle, and I distinctly heard him say, ‘Just run down for my pipe, quartermaster. You’ll find it on the shelf above my bunk.’

‘Yes, sir,’ answered the man. There was a shuffling of feet, and I knew that the mate had taken the wheel.

Beneath the bridge there was a small wheel-house, with an auxiliary steering-wheel which was only to be used if anything happened to the gear above. This house, though now converted into a lamp-room by the quartermasters, was, according to custom, kept ready for use

in case of necessity. Everything was ready and in its proper order—even to the binnacle lamp being lit.

Into this house, then, I slipped as soon as I heard the quartermaster clatter down the ladder, and, as if impelled by some intuition, I sprang towards the binnacle and gazed eagerly in at the compass. What my thoughts were may, perhaps, be guessed ; but I was conscious of the wave of relief that passed through me when I saw that we were still on our course. I had evidently misjudged Mr. Chief Officer Grover : had done that honest man a most grievous injury. Well, the best of us may err at times, and, if I had judged Mr. Grover harshly, he had only himself to thank for——

I started, leaving the thought unfinished, my eyes riveted to the face of the compass. One — two — three — four points it swung to the eastward, and then it steadied. I watched it breathlessly to see if it would swing back again. But no. The mate, on his own initiative, had actually altered the course of the vessel four points, and she was now steadied at that ! I could scarcely believe my eyes, credit my senses. I looked closer ;

I pinched myself to see if I were dreaming: but no, there was no longer any doubt. The ship's course was altered. Why? For what? I trembled as I thought of the answer such a question suggested. Chief Officer Grover had taken upon himself a dreadful responsibility. He had neither orders nor authority for altering the course of the ship. Indeed, such an alteration was fraught with incalculable danger. The last thing the captain said to me that night before he turned in was, 'Tell Mr. Grover to keep her on this course, and don't forget to let me know if you see anything.' Indeed, with the Paracels lying so close to the eastward of us, the mate had been guilty of a most reprehensible act, and I knew there would be a pretty set-out when the old man heard of it in the morning.

However, it was no affair of mine, and, as I was not anxious to cultivate the reputation of a sneak, I, after waiting till the quartermaster returned, went below. But sleep I could not. Whenever I closed my eyes I thought I saw the ship running over the land at express speed, steered by a gibbering demon who eventually took unto himself the shape of Mr.

Chief Officer Grover. Once I thought we were sailing upside down, as ships do in a mirage, and that upon the keel, with a glass in his hand and a pipe in his mouth, sat our worthy chief grinning diabolically at me. This was more than mere human flesh could bear. It was bad enough to dream of the ship cutting such extraordinary capers, but it was intolerable to be haunted by the presence of the mate. So, by way of relaxation, I got up and had a squint through the port.

The day was still a long way off, but it was surely breaking somewhere in the east, and through the early morning mists I felt almost sure that I could hear the low booming of far-off breakers. I listened, listened intently. But what with the grinding of the screw, the thump, thump of the engines, and the noise made by the water as it rushed hissing by, I was sorely confused. Moreover, strung as I was to such a pitch of excitement, I was readily persuaded to doubt my own hearing. And yet, sleep being entirely out of the question, I hurriedly filled a pipe, as a pretence for showing up, and then went on deck in my pyjamas.

Advancing to the starboard side, I leant on

the rail and tried to pierce the misty distance ; but nothing coming of it, I turned my eyes towards the bridge. A moment or two of intense scrutiny, and then I became conscious of the fact that several forms were flitting about on the port side a little abaft of that structure. I watched anxiously, scarcely knowing why, and then I thought I heard the mate's voice. This was immediately followed by the creaking of tackle. What could this mean? Scarcely giving myself time to think, I hurried round to the other side, and surprised the curious Wong and his half-dozen clerks straining every muscle to swing out the port lifeboat. The mate was giving his orders in hoarse whispers from his stand on the bridge.

Almost before they were aware of what had happened, I was in their midst.

‘Hallo, what’s this?’ I exclaimed. ‘Who gave you the orders to launch that boat?’

There was a moment or two of silence, and then the ingenuous Wong stepped forward.

‘Orders,’ he lisped, in his innocent, baby fashion, ‘Wong no sabbee orders.’

‘Who’s that?’ cried the mate, coming to the bridge ladder and peering down at us.

‘I—Emson.’

‘Well, what do you want?’ he growled.

‘Do you know these fellows are swinging out one of the lifeboats?’

‘What business is that of yours?’

‘I should like to know who gave them the order.’

‘That’s my affair,’ he bawled. ‘It’s your watch below. What do you want sneaking about the decks?’

‘It’s time to be about when you are getting ready the boats,’ I replied. ‘When do you expect her to strike?’

‘Damn you!’ he muttered, ‘you will insist on crossing me! Look out—you’ll cross me once too often. Now go below and mind your own —— business.’

‘I think I had better first tell the captain that you have altered the ship’s course four points to the eastward. He might be interested in the movement.’

I could not see the mate’s face, but I imagined it by the silence that followed. Then he shambled down the ladder and came to me.

‘What do you mean by that?’ he asked under his breath.

‘You know well enough.’

Continuing to advance, he said, ‘You’re too clever for me, Mr. Emson. I think we shall have to part company.’

‘Keep back!’ I cried, guessing the man’s horrible design, and seizing one of the long, heavy rowlocks of the boat; ‘if you lay a hand on me I’ll brain you.’

‘Then own that you’re a liar—that you don’t know what you’re talking about.’

‘I know perfectly well what I’m talking about.’

‘Then there’s only one way with sneaks. Wong, close up.’

I saw the hideous wretches form a semi-circle round me—my back was to the rail—and in another moment I knew I should see the glimmer of their knives. Then, just as I was on the point of charging, I heard the old man’s voice ring out distinct and clear.

‘Hullo! what the blazes is the matter here?’

The Chinamen instantly fell back; the mate hung his head and muttered incoherently. The captain was only one podgy little man, but he had the moral influence of twenty.

‘Mr. Grover has ordered out the lifeboat, sir.’

‘Eh?’ said the old man, in a tone which threw discredit on his hearing.

I repeated the information.

‘Lifeboat—ordered out,’ mumbled he. Then, seeming to grasp the situation, he turned sharply to the chief officer. ‘What does this mean, Mr. Grover?’

‘It means that I ain’t going to risk my damned skin for you nor twenty like you,’ bawled the mate defiantly.

‘Mr. Grover, sir,’ said the captain, ‘by God, sir, I never allow an officer of mine to speak to me like that.’

‘Then what do you want to hug the damned land for?’ yelled the mate, whose desperate position had endowed him with a desperate courage.

‘Hug the land, sir?’ repeated the bewildered captain.

‘Yes, sir, hug the land, sir,’ said the mate, imitating him.

‘Go below to your room, sir,’ roared the old man. ‘You’re drunk, sir, drunk.’

‘As you must have been, I reckon, when you set this ship’s course.’

The captain stood speechless, his stodgy

form quivering with anger. Then he began to splutter, but he hadn't got further than 'You infernal scoundrel,' when he stopped short and cocked up his stodgy little ears. A moment only he listened, we all listened, and then the ominous boom, boom of breakers was heard on our starboard bow. The old man sprang forward with a cry, and as he mounted the ladder of the bridge he screamed out:

'Starboard, starboard—hard a-starboard!'

'Hard a-starboard it is, sir,' answered the quartermaster, as he sent the wheel spinning and jammed it down. The nose of the ship slewed round to the west, and apparently not a moment too soon. As the bank of mist on our right suddenly lifted, I saw, not a hundred yards from us, a cluster of low black rocks—and we had been rushing straight upon them!

The captain then called for me to join him on the bridge, the mate, nothing daunted, following at my heels.

'Come here, Emson,' said the old man, 'I want to speak to you. As for you, Mr. Grover, you will please retire to the chart-room till you're wanted.'

'What for?' growled the mate.

‘Damn you, because I tell you!’

The mate slouched off with a very poor grace, and the captain, beckoning me aside, heard all I had to tell.

Yes, the whole story came out at the trial: how, for the sake of the insurance, Grover had entered into an arrangement with Wong to wreck the ship, for which crime he was to receive two thousand dollars. Ah Yeh, however, who was rightly called the clever one, stoutly denied any knowledge of the affair, and he had so guarded himself that no guilt could be laid to his charge.

Mr. Chief Officer Grover will not be able to go to sea again for seven years.

SAY ŌNARA

WHEN Vershiel first saw Hina-San she was romping in the garden of one of the big tea-houses of Kobe, playing, with a child of six or seven, a sort of battledore and shuttlecock. The peal upon peal of laughter which came from behind the big wistaria tree first attracted the man's attention. Wondering what could be the cause of so much merriment, he stole out into the grounds, and, behold, there was Hina-San in her white tabi, her face flushed, her eyes dancing with happiness. A pretty, plump, innocent-looking little thing, entering into the childish game with all the earnestness and energy of a child. For a few moments the man watched unobserved, watched with a cold, critical eye, letting no point of the view escape him. Then, with a smile on his face and a clapping of hands, he advanced into view.

The applause was the tribute paid to Hina-

San's skill and agility, and she smiled pleasantly, thinking it came from one of her companions; but when she saw the stranger advance, the flush on her face grew deeper, and she hung her head like a child caught doing a naughty thing.

Vershiel, still continuing to advance, smiled encouragingly at her, and nodded for her to continue her game; but she only hung her head and began to giggle.

'Then if you won't play,' he said, 'will you bring me some tea out here in the garden?'

She nodded, smiling: shuffled her feet into her straw sandals, and toddled off.

The man walked to a seat beneath the big wistaria, and, resting his face in his hands, watched the white clouds fluttering over the hill-tops. But did he see those clouds, note the sloping outline of the hills? or did he see anything but a palpitating bit of humanity in a cream kimono?

As she stood before him, the little tea-tray in her hands, the warm flush filling her face with sweetness, he found himself half wondering if the scene were real. But not alone was it real—it was a charming reality. He spoke,

and she answered with a smile. He thought he had never seen such pretty teeth. The mouth too, full and red, met with his entire approval. Indeed, the more he looked the more wonderful he thought it that a native woman should be so attractive, and he found himself thinking strange things about this pretty, odd creature. A *mousmee*, a tea-girl—an ignorant little thing who played baby games with all the ardour of a baby. And yet a woman.

Vershiel had not been long in Japan, nor was it expected that he would make a long stay. Business alone had brought him there, and, that business accomplished, he would depart. But, for all he knew to the contrary, he might be detained in Kobe for another six months, and he had been warned to beware of promiscuous loves.

He was very careful with Hina-San at first, knowing how easily terrified these little creatures are; but in her eyes he was a godlike personage, in whose presence she was scarcely fit to breathe, and, though he remained a god to the last, he was a god to whom she had grown accustomed.

Then came the interview with her parents and considerable haggling over the sum they were willing to take for a loan of their daughter for, say, six months. Hina-San herself felt flattered and honoured: flattered that the white stranger should condescend to look upon one so insignificant and unworthy, honoured that he should esteem her so greatly as to get her to come and keep house for him. The white stranger thought—but perhaps we had better not inquire into his thoughts. He did what every fellow who could afford it did, and, egad! he was deuced good to her.

Vershiel's nature was a purely business one, coldly calculating and extremely punctilious. A business arrangement was simply a business arrangement. If he promised to pay so many yen per month for an article, he considered that article his while he fulfilled the contract. There was no other obligation. As for sentiment—well, everybody knew that sentiment and the native women were as widely separated as the poles. True, he had no fault to find with Hina-San. The Japanese woman seems born for housekeeping, and Vershiel's housekeeper, as a housekeeper, was perfection. When the

bills for the first month came in, he was so astounded at her success that he straightway declared a dividend in favour of her and her parents. But here his interest in her ceased. As a companion she was a mere cipher—an interesting one, it is true, but a cipher nevertheless. He did not seem to think it possible that she might grow foolishly attached to him. He recognised her obligations; but for anything else he hadn't a second thought.

And yet her poor, ignorant little breast was full of love for him. If he touched her, the blood bounded through her veins with sickening rushes; if he carelessly flung an arm about her shoulders, every pulse in her body went throb, throb, till it seemed as though it would snap with the tension. Sometimes he kissed her, but not often. He admitted that he never cared for those curious-lidded dark brown eyes. Yet had he looked, looked with the thinking eye, he would have seen devotion inexpressible, love transcending all thought of earth. He saw only the peculiar lids, the ugly slits through which the eyes shone. And she, being but an ignorant, honest girl, was only half-conscious of the great devotion that had come to her.

She knew that for her there was but one god, and that Vershiel was his name. But as the devout would approach God with fear and trembling, so she approached her master ; and if he read not her heart, saw not the love in those eyes, how could she tell him ?

And so the weeks and the months flew by, Hina-San leading an enchanted life ; for he had grown kinder to her of late—perchance for more reasons than one : but whatever his reasons were, his kindness was received as a token of the master's pleasure in his hand-maiden, and she went blithely to and fro. Then the time came when he had to break the news of his intending departure. The six months of their contract had elapsed : he was going away to Yokohama, and she must go back to her people.

She listened to him like one who hears but does not comprehend. Then her face grew suddenly white, and with a little heartbroken sob she turned away. She could not have told him what she felt, even if she could have formed the words—it would have been taking too great a liberty with her honourable lord. She could only steal away and bury her face

in her hands: wonder at the strange lump in her throat, the sudden chill that enwrapped her heart: marvel at the awful coldness and emptiness of the world. An hour ago the sun was shining, the world was full of light and loveliness: now the great lamp had gone out, and the winter storms were howling round the desolate dwelling.

Vershiel thought he could sever the connection as easily as he had made it. He gave her lots of money, he heaped presents upon her and her people; he did all that a generous business man could do, and marvelled much at her apathy. He did not seem to take into account the woman's great love, her unselfish devotion, or the fact that ere long she would be a mother. Not knowing the love, he could not feel the regret: the unselfish devotion would have made him smile. How was he to know that the girl valued the money so little that she never kept a yen of it, but handed it over intact to her parents? As for the motherhood—that was a trifling inconvenience which she and her people would have to see to. Moreover, he doubted the story, or doubted what they would have him believe.

How could he credit her honesty? His friends laughed heartily at the mere suggestion. It was always the last card, they said. Everybody had had a similar experience; but a few yen always smoothed the difficulty.

And so, despite her tears, entreaties, and the hopeless pathos of her brown eyes, he said *sayōnara* (farewell), and went away, and by emptying his purse in her lap thought he had discharged all obligations. To be sure, there was the half-promise to come back, wrung from him in a moment of weakness to alleviate her distress; but it was a promise he had no real intention of fulfilling, and as such it sat lightly on his conscience. It mattered nothing that the poor, ignorant girl hugged it madly to her soul, that joy unspeakable darted to her pathetic eyes as she pictured the joyous home-coming: it mattered nothing, this breaking of a native woman's heart.

She went back to her people, rich, laden with presents, and was petted and made much of while the riches lasted; but the pettings of home, the love of interested parents, were probably accepted at their proper value. It all helped to make the long, dreary days pass

till he returned, and to make those days pass was now her only object in life. But day ran to week, and week to month, and yet he came not. Still she bore up bravely, believing in that promise, though her face grew paler and thinner, and the pathos in her eyes more pitiful. 'He will come,' she whispered consolingly to herself; 'he will come in time to welcome the little one—our little one. He is great, he is good, and he will not forget his Hina-San, his little Hina-San. Oh, my beloved, come, come!' And the little plump brown hands went out entreatingly, and the brown pathetic eyes shone sadly through the blinding tears.

And so day succeeded day, and at last the little one came; and when her people saw that it was a white man's child they hated it with a mad, unreasoning hatred, bitterly censuring their daughter for her stupidity. But to her who had loved the father, the wee thing came in time to save her brain from bursting, her heart from breaking. Every drop of white blood that ran in its veins was sacred to her—a sacred link connecting her with the never-to-be-forgotten past.

But when her money was spent, and one by

one her trinkets had gone, and she was once more as poor as in the days when Vershiel first saw her, then began the bitter tauntings of her people. And they said, 'Cast out the brat of this white man, this thief who leaves you both to perish. Why shouldst thou carry about this living shame, so that all who see may mock at thee and us? A curse on him and all his race! Nothing but misery have the white men brought to our land.' And they grew wroth with her because she paid no heed to them. But to her the child was dearer, far dearer than life. For every precious drop of white blood that coursed through its tiny veins she would have died a dozen deaths. There was something more than pathos in the brown eyes now.

But they were cruel days of waiting, and poor Hina-San grew pale and weary, and the child languished in consequence. Then was it her people bade her go forth, she and her shame; and never again did they see her, or hear the voice of the white shame cry—except in their dreams.

With her baby on her back she tramped to the tea-house where she had first met Vershiel,

and, in consequence of good service, she was reinstalled in her old position. But it was no longer the Hina-San of old who came back, not the Hina-San who had romped childishly with the child, not the rosy-faced girl who had brought the tea to the white stranger beneath the big wistaria. A dozen times she went over the scene. There were the seat and the table just as they had been a year ago, there was the big tree a mass of blossom. She shut her eyes and tried to fancy he was sitting there, just as he had sat that day. She brought her white shame and sat him in the seat of his father, and even as she looked her vision grew blurred, and the one word, 'Yokohama,' the word that had haunted her for months past, started to her lips. Yes, she would go to Yokohama; she had long thought of it: now her mind was made up. It seemed a terrible journey, a fearful undertaking; but she would go, and, when he heard her story, saw him whom her people called the white shame, he would surely take her back to him as in the old days.

So, when she had saved enough money to pay her passage to Yokohama, she went down to one of the big steamers, and they stowed

her away somewhere between-decks, she and her white shame; and she knew little more till they came to tell her that the ship had arrived at Yokohama.

Yokohama! She awoke from her long dream, allowed them to lead her up the companion, and down into a small boat. Then they rowed her across the water to the hatoba, and as she walked up the steps, her white shame slung on her back, they told her that she was in Yokohama.

Yokohama! She gazed round bewildered. Yokohama at last! The place he had come to, the place where he lived! Now all her troubles were over: she had come to Yokohama—to him!

For hours she wandered about repeating the name 'Vershiel—Mr. Vershiel,' but all to whom she spoke stared at her with curious insolence, or laughed outright in her face. But one, more kind than the others, who saw the agony in her eyes, told her to go to the European quarter and inquire, and even took the trouble to show her the way. There she learnt that Mr. Vershiel, who belonged to one of the biggest houses in Japan, had long since sailed

for England. England! The thought almost staggered her. England, that land beyond the sea, beyond the sun—beyond the world, it seemed. Her voice grew tremulous, her sad eyes full of agony. When had he gone? Many months ago in the s.s. *Hakodate*. *Hakodate*, ha! She would remember that name. And when would the *Hakodate* be back? They could not say, but probably at the end of the year.

So away she went, sore at heart and yet clinging to her last fond hope. She procured lodgings, found employment, and then set herself to keep her long vigil. The *Hakodate* would surely come back one day, and that day she must be there to hear the good news. So every evening, when her work was done, she slung her white shame across her shoulders and walked from the native quarter to the English hatoba, and asked the sampan men if the *Hakodate* had yet arrived; and when they said no, she turned about and toddled back murmuring, 'To-morrow, to-morrow—perhaps he will come to-morrow.'

But the to-morrows came and went, the weeks ran into months, and yet the ship came not. But one evening, a cold stormy night,

as she arrived pale and shivering at the hatoba, she saw a boat coming ashore from a big ship which evidently had just arrived ; and one of the sampan men called out to her—for they all knew her and her quest by this time—‘That big ship yonder is the *Hakodate*.’ She heard him and trembled, but it was with a joy that almost frightened her.

As the boat approached the landing-stage she watched it intently, and saw that there were several white men aboard it, but her eyes grew so dim with tears that she could not make out their faces. Eagerly, but vainly, she sought to clear her eyes ; nor till the men had come up the steps and were close upon her did she see that he was not there. Then she stepped forward to one, the one who had given her the information upon her first arrival in Yohohama, and cried out, ‘Vershiel—Mr. Vershiel—have he no come?’

The man started ; then, recognising her, said, ‘No, my poor woman—Mr. Vershiel is in England.’

‘But—he—will—come?’ The slow, broken English was full of hesitation—of hesitation and intense pain.

‘Mr. Vershiel will never come to Japan again.’

‘Not come—not come?’

But the man shook his head at the pathetic little figure and marched on.

Early the next morning some fishermen discovered the bodies of a woman and a child floating some three miles above the settlement. The child was clasped in the woman’s arms. In the bosom of the woman’s kimono they found the photograph of a somewhat sinister though decidedly good-looking European. Across the back of the card was written in native characters the one word, ‘Sayōnara.’

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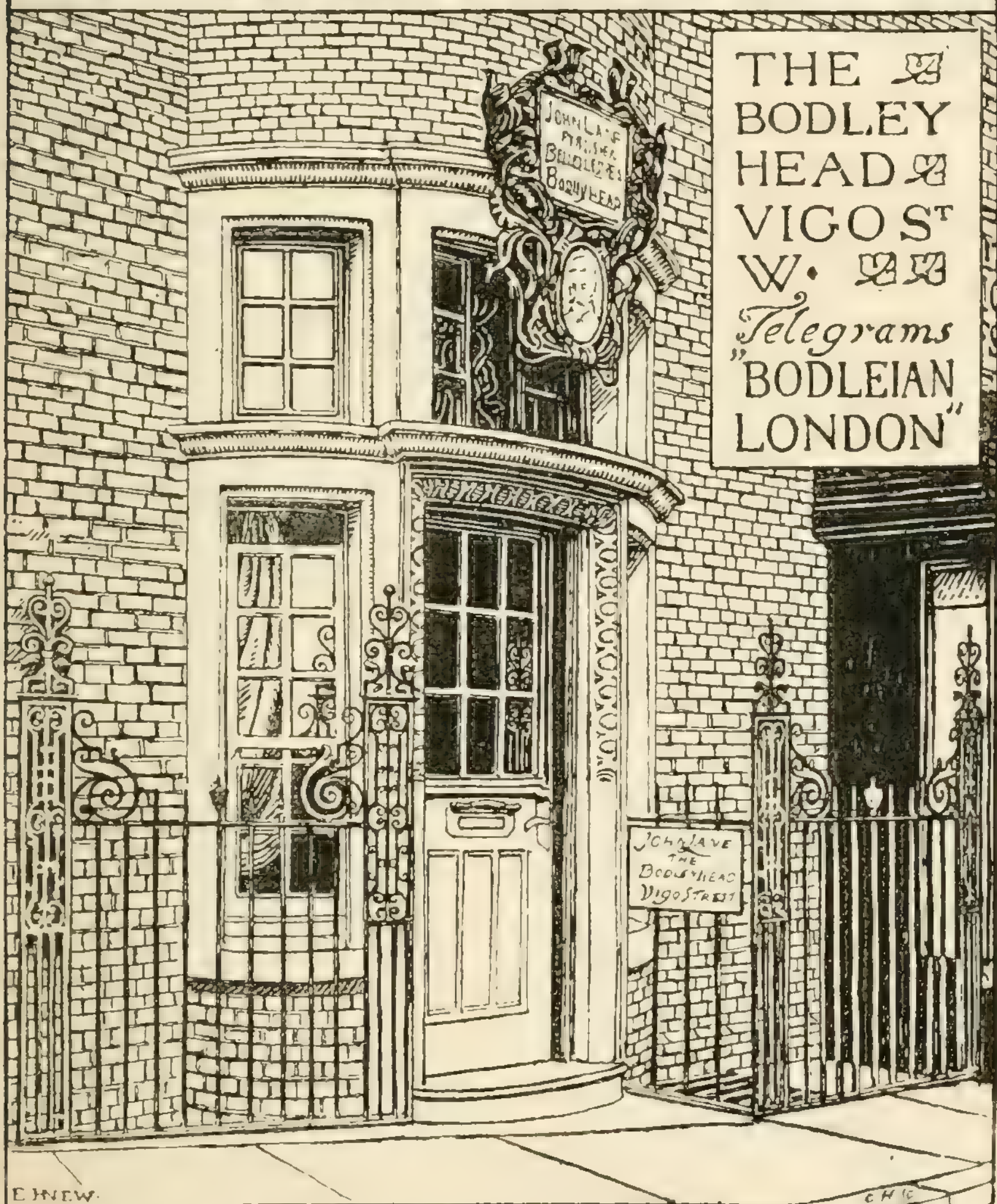
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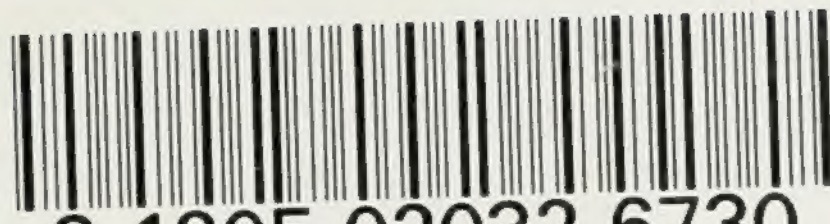
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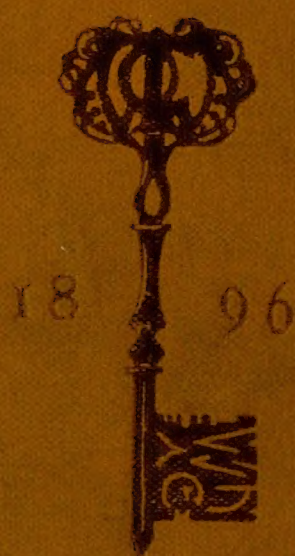


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